Nor ever, Neither never Goodbye

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/19239466.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Rape/Non-Con
Categories:	F/F, M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Abigail Hobbs, Will Graham & Abigail Hobbs & Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom/Margot Verger
Characters:	Will Graham, Will Graham's Parents, Hannibal Lecter, Chiyoh (Hannibal), Jack Crawford, Wendigo (Hannibal), Molly Graham, Alana Bloom, Dr. Frederick Chilton, Abel Gideon, Original Characters, Lady Murasaki (Hannibal Rising), Robert Lecter, Winston (Hannibal), Buster (Hannibal), Will Graham's Dogs, Abigail Hobbs, Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Margot Verger, Mason Verger
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe, Domestic Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Not Beta Read, I Will Go Down With This Ship, Blood and Gore, Hurt/Comfort, Betrayal, Slow Burn, Stigmata, Oral Sex, Rough Sex, Non-Sexual Intimacy, Age Difference, Will is a Mess, Hannibal is about 35...ish, Idiots in Love, Hannibal is a bit not good, I'm Bad At Tagging, Will is 21 guys, Hannibal might be a killer, shocking, I know, Murder Mystery, Bad Things Happen to Children, I'm Sorry, I'll update and remove tags as I go, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Canonical things might happen, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, Emotional Manipulation, Canon-Typical Violence, Panic Attacks, Canonical Character Death, The rape/non-con tag is NOT between Hannibal and Will, Alternate Universe - Soulmates, #A happy ending will come. Eventually, Complete, Original Character(s)
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of I think I might have inhaled You
Stats:	Published: 2019-06-16 Completed: 2021-07-01 Words: 97,938 Chapters: 19/19

Nor ever, Neither never Goodbye

by Angstyfandom_happyending

Summary

Will's fingers had gone white around the notepad that he clutched in his hand. He didn't believe he could say a word without falling down. His head spun, he felt nauseous. He just wanted to get as far away as he could. Away from this man.

"He said that he had a nightmare." Will began his voice choked, though his face remained stoic. "He saw that there was a monster underneath his bed. He couldn't move, he couldn't shout. He wanted to wake Nathaniel up but everything was too dark. He said that he had started to sob and it was then that the monster came out and hugged him. He wasn't scared anymore."

A balmy light sparkled in his blue eyes, the red puffiness around it only enhancing the colour. "And what did the monster say?"

Will's voice, when it came, sounded as if he was hearing himself speak from the top of a mountain while he was at the bottom of the rift.

"It's the good boys that get eaten by the monster."

Notes

So, I was inspired by this GREAT manga called STIGMATA : SEIKON SOUSA wherein the protagonist is stigmatized in the same manner as the victims he profiles. Check it out! It's so brilliant.

How the whole soulmate thing works will be explained in the latter chapters. I'm writing as I'm inspired so it would mean a lot if you dropped a comment about how you liked it?

On with the story!

Chapter One

The playground had been secured by yellow tapes warning off civilians to stay clear of the area.

Still there was a considerable crowd gathered curiously across the road, few of the more daring and those simply curious of having found something different than the monotony of their lives lingered nervously around the fringes, trying to chat up the police who stood ground stoically.

The forensic team was only just wrapping up their equipments, some of them talking in agitated gestures. The snaps of a few cameras clicking furiously nearby made Will startle out of the inane thoughts that he was lost in and he looked up in alarm to see a flash of bright red near his periphery. He grimaced in distaste, tonguing his cheek as if there was a foul taste hanging off his palate and he shifted his eyes towards where he could see the sharp, stocky figure of Jack Crawford barking off orders to his agents.

He tugged on the hood of his blue raincoat so that it hid half of his face. Even though it had long since stopped raining the sky overhead was cast with angry sullen clouds that drifted in muted annoyance. Or maybe he was just projecting his own feelings. It was probably just that.

He felt the presence behind him first than he heard the measured footsteps drawing closer. He didn't turn back or gave any indication that he had heard him but the tightness in his chest loosened incrementally and he consciously let go off the coat he was bunching on his sides and drew a deep breath.

"If you are feeling under the weather we can return to my car. You are under no obligation to be here on your much needed vacation, Will. Jack will have to understand."

He shook his head, eyes straying to the brightly coloured swings that was still marked by the blood of the victim, appearing haunted and still ; as if it were stunned by the violence that took place before it and was forever changed because of that. He wondered if it would have been easier for him to connect with non - inanimate objects witnessing the crimes than the victims themselves. Perhaps he'd be little less marked by the horrors of their last moments when they didn't have to feel human emotions.

"I want to be here, Dr. Lecter. You know I can help."

"Of course. But the cost at which your help comes is too detrimental to your mind and your body. I only wish you would think about helping yourself just as much."

He fought off the grin that wanted to break out on his face, knowing it would further aggravate Dr. Lecter. He tilted his head slightly in acquiescence but walked determinedly towards Jack. He heard Dr. Lecter sigh softly, almost imperceptible if one weren't looking out for it, but he was and he did grin then.

He had been cooped up inside Dr. Lecter's morbidly lavish house in the upper creme of Baltimore residents and even if he had been taken by the gothic interior designing of his house and his odd choice of decorating his dinning room with disturbing pieces of art, he had soon found himself staring out of the frosted windows for hours on end. Dr. Lecter was a busy man -- a very important man, and he already took up so much time and space of his private life that it was almost criminal to ask anything from him.

So he was excited, shamefully, when he saw Jack's number flashing on his phone. But it only lasted for a woefully short time until Jack told him who the victim was.

A ten year old boy.

"Ah, Will." Jack said when he saw him approaching. He waved away the agents he was talking with who took off in relief and trained his intense stare on Will.

"The body has already been taken to the lab. It was a bloody circus by the time we came here. The local police were at their wits end, seeing that something of this nature had never happened in this small town. There were nearly a dozen footprints running amok before the they sealed of the place properly. The scene was...well, it was as shocking as you'd expect when a child is involved. The body was found there," Will followed the line of Jack's finger and saw the bloodied left swing which still had gory bits stuck to the chains on either sides, "the forearms and hands were stitched with the chains to keep the body upright. The perp used metal wires to hold --"

Will began to convulse.

Blood spurted and then gushed in short rapid bursts from his throat as he clutched at it, gasping and wheezing. His legs slipped under him and fell but he wasn't aware. He was terrified. He was so terrified. It was all pain and fear before when he was grabbed, but now it only burnt. He tried to see the man who was crouching before him but his sight was getting blurry. He was burning and he couldn't breathe. He tried to reach out but his hand slipped in air and he choked in his own blood. He didn't understand what was happening but he was scared, he was scared, he was ---

"Will. Will, what do you see?"

That voice.

He knew that voice. Not the 'him' who was a child but the 'him' that was he. He had to focus on that voice. What did it say?

"Will feel my hand on your shoulder. There. You are here. With me. What did you see?"

Will shuddered. The coppery tang was filling his mouth. He spat and tried to breathe.

"He -- he was taken from his way back home. Maybe he was -- he was returning from a shop or, or I don't--" he coughed. "He didn't know the man. It - it was a man. Mid to late 50s. Bulky. Sweaty. But I --"

He wheezed and spluttered, his breath finally becoming even.
He blinked back the tears and stared straight ahead. He took in lung ful of breath, grateful for this.

"Are you dead Will?"

Will nodded jerkingly. "Y-Yeah. I am dead." He shivered and wrapped his hands around himself. His raincoat was heavy with his own blood even though the wound on his throat was disappearing. He looked up and saw Dr. Lecter's face only inches away from him, his arms holding him steady. Will quickly averted his eyes, leaning back into his warmth but wincing about his blood ruining yet another expensive suit of his.

"I um, the victim. He didn't see the face. Maybe he was hiding his face or something. I'm, I'm sorry. There's not much I could see."

"It's okay Will. It is not your fault that the victim couldn't see his murderer, and if they hid their identity."

"No. No I don't think the killer was wearing a mask or something. I could see his face but it was not...it was blurry. Confused. I think the killer was waiting for the boy to come out of the store. He snatched him up and drove him here. It must not be far away. I didn't feel it was too long. He quickly killed the boy as soon as he brought him to this place. And then he..." Will trailed off, not wanting to think anymore about the fate of the child.

"I hope that this would suffice for your investigation, Jack." Dr. Lecter informed not taking away his arms from around Will.

Jack looked discomfited by the rather disconcerting scene before him. No matter how many times he watched Will getting brutalized in the same manner as the victims and then being completely unfazed by it afterwards, he still couldn't help but to be apprehensive about his unique set of constitution. Perhaps more bizarre than his soulmate link was the ability that came with it.

"Yes. It will be more than enough Dr. Lecter. I apologise for calling Will in even when he was on his vacation. Cases like this demands all the help that we can get and Will's ability will help us locking away the son of a bitch faster. Will, you doing okay?"

He nodded as he stood up. He cringed at the crusty feeling of the blood and turned away from them, walking towards the side of the road where Dr. Lecter's Bentley was parked. He contemplated if he should get inside the car. He did remember to bring his wallet with him. He could just call a cab. Though he had to explain a lot in that case.

"Will."

Dr. Lecter's otherwise neatly combed hair was looking slightly out of place, a tuft of his sand - white hair falling over his maroon eyes that shone with worry.

Will still couldn't believe how he ended up being so lucky after everything that happened. How he wasn't cursed to a life damned to blood and pain and being alone.

"Are you cold Will? Do you still hurt?"

"I'm fine Dr. Lecter. Just a little too much blood drying in uncomfortable places. I ruined your suit. Again. I'm sorry."

He stepped closer and the refined sandalwood musk of his perfume filled Will's head in familiarity. His large long - boned hand hovered above his own, but he went for the door of the car and opened it up as the gentleman he was and Will felt horrified at the heat that crept up his neck.

"Let's go home Will."

Will met his eyes then, green - blue eyes reflecting in the depthless maroon eyes. The unrealized bond between them strumming with heat.

"Yes."

Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

Hi!
To everyone who have read : THANK YOU!!!
And to those who left kudos : THANK YOU SO MUCH YOU'RE THE BEST!!!

I didn't really think this will get any attention but I'm so glad that you guys are reading it!

And as you might notice, the tags have been changed and I've increased Will's age to 21 from 18 because of reasons. And I know it might be annoying but please bear with me. I'm learning as I go and tags are really difficult.

On with the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's mind space wasn't as magnificent or as striking as the Sistine Chapel at Palermo.

Dr. Lecter had been polite enough to teach him the useful techniques to store and retain memories of the things and people he came across and deemed important enough to remember. But the reason why he wanted a mind space was to carve out a niche in his own mind, where he could keep all the dark thoughts and memories that were to unpalatable for him to digest safely. There were things that his mind saw. Things that weren't there and those that his mind warped into something ugly and nightmarish. They used to keep him up at night when he was a boy. He didn't worry about monsters lurking under his bed because he knew who the monsters were and they wore a friendly smile.

The people he usually came across had a disturbing tendency of either getting themselves killed or worse, killing themselves in his vicinity. His father used to crack jokes in good nature when things became too overwhelming about how Will attracted the dead like bees to flowers, but then one day he almost choked on air as his mother drowned herself in the bathtub upstairs.

His father never laughed again after that.

But nonetheless, one of the happier memories that he had of his time spent with his father working on motor boats in Louisiana was the toolshed his father had built for their run - down shop. It was more of a shack than anything else but his father had taught him most of what he knew in those days.

His mnemonic structure was the toolshed with racks upon racks stacked up systematically which were filled with boxes containing the bits and pieces from the people he had come across. He kept them within him, after he sensed their reliefs and quietly visit them on bad days, to remind himself where and how he was. Alive.

His eyes flitted to Dr. Lecter who drove with an air of casual elegance that was both enigmatic and ridiculous. He had never seen another man so well put together and meticulously presented. If he didn't know any better, Will would have chalked him up to be snobbish stuck - up and never given him another thought. But he knew that this persona of a highly sophisticated and cultured intellectual that Dr. Lecter wore around like a armour was just as much a part of who he was as were his other selves that he'd very rarely catch a glimpse of.

A person was seldom a single entity and Dr. Lecter had taught him that foremost. Even he must have so many selves to go around in different situations. *All of us carrying our own personalized closet of person suits wherever we go. Being naked for the world to see must be such a scandalous affair.*

"You are lost in your thoughts, Will. What has you thinking so loudly."

Dr. Lecter never really asked questions, only posed them as such with an air of openness that lured you in.

Will played with the end of his raincoat, looking outside of the window at the blurring green giving way to houses and shops.

"Did Jack really apologise to you or was I hearing things?"

He didn't have to look to know the not-quite-there smile that was playing on Dr. Lecter's lips.

"Uncle Jack was more disturbed than usual with the present case. I had heard of a similar crime being committed in another town not very far from there. Though it happened nearly a decade ago, but the circumstances were odd enough to Jack that he mentioned it to me."

Will sat up straight frowning slightly at Dr. Lecter.
"You talked with each other before bringing me in?"

"I had consulted with them on that particular case years ago as the child murdered was related to one of my patients."

Will folded his arms a little sullen. He had thought Jack had finally realized that he was mature enough to deal with these sort of things without the permission from Dr. Lecter. Sure the cases he was brought in for could get rough but he was useful to them far more if he was actually present at the crime scene. And when he had got that call asking him to come there, he thought that maybe he was ready for the work that he found himself good at.

"So you persuaded Jack into letting me come there. And he didn't throw a fit?"

"I knew how upset you were becoming at the house. When the situation presented itself I wanted to make sure you were ready before you valiantly jumped into the fire."

Will scoffed.

"And Jack was desperate."

Will didn't really want to smile but he did, his fingers absently trailing up to the soft skin under his left wrist, circling the soul-mark that was mirrored at the same place on Dr. Lecter's hand.

****

By the time Professor Sogliato's lecture on Dante wrapped up, Will was close to tears.

He had almost fallen asleep twice in the class but somehow managed to feint attention long enough that he survived through the class. He spotted Beverly down the hall and he made his

way to her.

She was talking with a couple of girls in her class and when she saw him coming over, she quickly bade them goodbyes and turned excitedly towards him.

"So, guess who survived the family reunion?"

“Not you of course.”

“Smartass. But whatever. I didn’t think it was possible. By the time they reached the part where I had taken up criminal psychology and the *very weird* questions that they were asking, I was out of the door and inside my car. But then I decided that I was actually going to be a badass about it and survive it!”

Will chuckled softly, knowing how strung up Beverley’s extended family could be sometimes.

“But enough about me. Did you inform Dr. Smooth about the seminar that Miss Bloom invited you to?”

Will could feel his ears burning but he tried not to react too much. But given that Beverley knew about his helpless crush on Alana, she grinned ear to ear.

“You sly dog! Did something happened between you two? Am I actually going to be a part of some smouldering teacher-student action in college?!”

“*BEVERLEY*! God, could you at least be a little quiet about these ridiculous things! And no. Why would anything happen? She is married and has a son!”

“So? Affairs are a thing, you know.”

Will sighed. “They are soulmates Bev. You know those sort of things are almost impossible to do with the sort of connection mated – pairs share. And anyway, there’s nothing happening between us. It was just that the last time I talked to her she had – um,”

“What? Hey, don’t jam up on me!”

“She um, had a mark...on her...” he trailed off, now truly blushing and ducked his head remembering the dark bruise that was sitting inconspicuously on the base of her throat and he had only noticed it because he had been admittedly staring at the neckline of the shockingly red formal dress that she was wearing and her hair had been swept away by a gush of wind when they were walking outside in the parking lot.
Beverley whistled as they walked into the canteen and shook her head.

“Your crush on her is cute if not a little sad. Okay, a lot sad. But you’re a looker underneath the grumpy and messy sassiness so you should be fine before the event rolls around.”

“Well I might swoon from all this praise being thrown at me.”

“Your deadpan voice is seriously concerning. But no. Seriously Graham. You can’t let this opportunity go. The best of the bests would be attending the seminar. You're already halfway through your thesis. This is your time to shine! You don’t need me reminding you of that.”

Will didn’t say anything but mulled over it well into the next classes.

He knew that it was a once in a lifetime opportunity and given his weird constitution was a secret, he only had his scholarly skills at his disposal. And he was good at profiling, he wasn’t modest about the truth, but that kind of exposure would go a long way for his career. And if he really had to prove how capable he was to Dr. Lecter, then he had to do it all on his own.
Will wasn’t stupid enough to ignore the risks of being involved in the type of cases Jack asked him to look into. How he had kept Freddie from running her mouth out into the open world, was beyond him but he suspected that the anonymous tips and certain confidential citations that Freddie claimed in her recent articles, were to be of any indication, Jack seemed to have struck a bargain with the devil. But he knew how much Freddie’s promises are of worth. And even if he did help people both living and dead doing what he did, the physical aspect of his constitution was becoming more taxing the more he did it. Being stigmatized in the same way as the victims were killed didn’t leave him with any lasting injuries and any and all blood that he did lose was always replenished by an hour at most.

However it was becoming increasingly troublesome to distinguish between which memories were his own and which were borrowed. Dr. Lecter noticed, of course he did. But he was content to let it hang and grow between them until Will took the first step and came out with it to him. But Will was more than comfortable to skirt around that topic as well, only talking about it in long – winded and highly philosophical jargon but he enjoyed that as much as he enjoyed those quiet days were they never spoke any words, moving along with each other in the house, each doing their own work and aware of each other’s presence.

Will was also content to never bring up the topic of them being soulmates after that one time. The only time Will was scared of Dr. Lecter.

But he was getting ahead of himself.

He had to do something which was, not even indirectly, depended on Dr. Lecter.

He'd write back to Alana telling her that he was interested in the gala. The only thing left to do was finding a plus one for the event.

And wasn't that the most easiest thing to do.

****

"But what if the constitution I get was something twisted? Like – like developing a fetish for cheese and it ruins cheese for me for my whole life?! Would you ever forgive yourself if you were suddenly attracted to cheese just because your soulmate is a – an *affineur*!"

Hannibal easily reached forward to grab the box of tissues kept on the study desk beside him and held it out to the blabbering, sweating man sitting in front of him. His hand stayed just out of the reach of Franklyn Froideveaux, calculated to make the man go out of his way to get the box without being too discourteous. The man grabbed the box gratefully, and Hannibal didn't miss the way his fingers tried to touch Hannibal's so he had kept them out of reach.

Franklyn blew wetly on a wad of tissues and Hannibal watched in mild distaste as he crumpled the tissues into a ball and kept it on the table. Hannibal's eyes darted between the ball of snot laden tissues on his immaculately cleaned and arranged table and then to the man suffering from a severe neurosis in front of him and languidly wondered how much tissues it would take before he choked on it and died.

"I rarely eat anything that I will come to regret Franklyn. I'm very particular about the things I eat."

Franklyn gulped nervously and then sniffed loudly. “ Well...I too only eat the best kind of cheese out there Dr. Lecter. I’ve discovered something new about me just now. Cheese is my passion.”

“Having a passion will definitely help you feel more grounded to reality and give you something useful to focus on. And as for the matter of twisted constitutions : the phenomena of finding a soulmate and then connecting to them in a manner where certain traits of your personality gets triggered and amplified is a topic which is less understood by the cold logics of the scientists and very much discussed by the philosophers. It is far more complicated and intricate than simply sparking off recessive character traits or even hidden fetishes that might speak of the kind of personality your other half is suppose to have. It is much profound than that.”

Franklyn nodded his head sincerely, soaking up all the words that Hannibal spoke like a sponge.

“You are right of course, Hannibal. May I call you Hannibal? I’ve found that you have been a much better friend to me than the one I call my best friend.”

“You may not, and I am not your friend Franklyn. I am here to help you navigate the troubles you face in your life on your own. To defeat the monsters you perceive to be haunting you.”

Franklyn's face fell and his already jittery leg crossed at the knee started jerking in anxiety.

Hannibal did not look at the offending leg.

“But why? I...I can be a good friend, Ha- Dr. Lecter. Is it...is it because of my neurosis? Is it because of that?”

Hannibal leaned back candidly, giving a pointed glance down at his watch and uncrossed his legs.

“If you weren’t neurotic you’d be something far worse. You have to believe that weaknesses you perceive are preys you can overcome easily. There are no monsters trying to bring you down but only those you allow. Trust me Franklyn, you will know when there’s a real monster in the room.”

Walking Franklyn to the door and being done with the patients he was seeing for today was

something he was looking forward to. But he was pleasantly surprised to see Will waiting outside when he opened the door.

Will turned around and opened his mouth before he was interrupted by Franklyn who held out his hand to Will which was promptly ignored.

“Will, this is a private exit for my patients.” Hannibal chided softly.

Will ran his hand through the supple locks of his hair, the blue tee shirt that he wore accentuating his eyes.

“I’m sorry. I was impatient. I’ll- I’m going.”

And then Will was out in a rush.

“Who was that Ha- Dr. Lecter?”

“I believe it is almost time for my last patient to arrive Franklyn. I will see you again in next week.” Is what he said to him but his mind called out persistently ‘*My soulmate'*.

Chapter End Notes

Drop a comment if you want to gawk at Hannibal as he flips non- human meat in a pan elegantly.

Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

So, I had lots of fun writing this!
Will struggling with his reactions to Hannibal is just something I find infinitely amusing!!

Hope you like this chapter!

It was raining incessantly from yesterday night.

Will was looking blandly out of the window of his small room, sitting cross-legged on the crammed up suitcases that served as furniture. The outside was painted grey, the trees standing out strikingly as the deepest green they ever seem to be. There was a brook some yards away, hidden by the dense undergrowth and brambles, tucked neatly off to a side at a distance of a three minutes walk. He could see it sometimes if the sky was clear and he had the patience. But in the downpour, everything melded into each other: a buzzing black and white interspersed with green that seemed grateful for the relief after such a harsh summer.

He didn't open the window, stared at it through the glass, sometimes following the many trails as rain splattered against it. Sometimes imagining a stray droplet making its way down to the side of the window, down the wall along the pipeline and then disappearing into the ground. He hadn't been enrolled in a school yet. They had just moved here and it had only been a week. His dad had found a job at a nearby factory and the pay was good enough for them.

It was a Sunday but he hadn't heard his dad downstairs and he didn't feel like going down just yet. He yawned and rubbed at the left over sleep in his eyes and blinked owlishly at the rain.

A knock at his door startled him and he scrambled off the suitcase and launched at the bed. Pulling up the covers up to his chest he answered back.

His dad peeked inside opening the door slightly. His eyes first went to his son, looking dishevelled and decidedly at rest on the bed, and then to the window to the right, the curtains of which were drawn back. He sighed through his nose and stepped inside, settling at the foot of the bed and awkwardly kept his hands to himself.

He cleared his throat, giving a battered smile at his son and was relieved to see it returned. He had been worried slightly, if Will would be alright with the hasty move form the previous town. It had been good for them. But as good things were ought to, it came to an end quite suddenly, no doubt spurred by his own mounting debts and the bills that only grew.

“Mornin' champ. You feeling good?”

Will nodded, dragging the covers upto his neck and very consciously not sniffling as he breathed.

“Were you burning up durin' the night? I had kept the pills on your desk. Did you find it?”

“Yeah, Dad. And no, the fever didn’t come back.” Will said, his voice sounding a lot less cracked and sickly than it had been for the past two days.

“Good, good.”

They sat there for a moment longer, each grappling for things to speak about.

Will finally decided to break the silence, he had grown to develop a dislike for it.

“Should I make breakfast?”

“No, no. No need. I’ve made it already. Pancakes. With honey. Just bought it in the mornin'.”

It was one of those days, Will thought with a tentative happiness. One of those increasingly

rarer days when his dad would wake up and didn't feel the need to fill his belly with half a bottle of whisky. He must have seen the look in Will's face, he still hadn't perfected the art of masking his anxiety under a wall of prickly temper and sharp tongue, and his dad knew him well. He was the first of the people who actually bothered enough to know him. So he knew what Will was thinking, just as Will knew how desperate he was to make it up to Will for tearing him away from the semi – settled life in Georgia because of the people he owed money to had started showing up at Will's school.

He gave the Graham smile that was something of a special brand of his family. His dad had told him his pa had got it from his father. It was a mix of a dry charming tilt of one corner of his lips, only showing a silver of teeth which was coupled by a deep exhale, and tired, guilty eyes which were a must for this kind of smile. Will hadn't yet perfected it. But he would.

"You wanna eat first and then do somethin' interestin'?"

Will perked up at the sound of it.

"Are we going to your workshop?"

His father chuckled dryly and shook his head. "Not so fast champ. You're hand still needs to recover from the mallet you took to it and there's nothin' for me to fix now. I was thinkin' if you were feeling up to it, we could, dunnow, go down by the brook for some fishin'. Rain is good for topwater bait and I have plenty of time today. What do you say?"

Will nodded enthusiastically and his dad ruffled his hair.

"Get ready and come down, yeah?"

Will had gobbled down the pancakes with a healthy amount of honey in a record time. Even taking two servings and his dad had laughed good naturedly. He had grabbed his blue raincoat and already gathered the poppers and rip cord, and a large basket by the time his dad had got ready.

They trudged through the small field which opened up to the undergrowth. When they finally arrived at the shallow ledge of the brook the rain had picked up pace again. They found a

good spot and set up their tools on the muddy ground. After everything was set up, they waited for their baits to turn up fishes.

“The rain gives them more energy and they are restless with all the commotion that the droplets cause on the surface of the water. That’s why they become more aggressive, and the nutrients deep under the water are pushed upwards, attracting shoals of them to the surface. That’s why you need not do much with the baits, but be alert and have patience.” His dad instructed and Will listened carefully. His dad burned a smoke and took a long drag. Will had missed these days, when he actually found his dad so close to him. And they didn’t have to speak into the silence necessarily. There was a understanding that grew from suffering together. He cherished that kinship.

“Your ma never liked goin’ out in the rain.” He began, surprising Will because it was the first time in two years that he actually spoke directly about her.

“She didn’t like getting wet and hated mud getting inside her shoes. She preferred staying indoors and watching any drivel on tele than going out on a day like this. Scared of all kinds of bugs that’d come out during this time. But sometimes she’d offer to come with me. She said it was to keep my morale when I’d turn up dry but I think she just enjoyed watchin’ me have fun after a week of work.”

Will dared not speak. He felt a tug on his cord and he reeled it back, grinning when he saw he had caught one.

His dad greeted him with a wink and Will laughed, feeling giddy.

“You...you are a lot like her. In your quietness. In the way you watch but never say. I see her in you, as you grow older.”

Will's laugh froze on his face and he became stiff. The joy he felt for having caught a fish disappeared and he sat there, refusing to look his dad in the eyes.
They didn’t speak after that. They fished until late afternoon, by the time rain finally let on, they had a bucket full of fresh water fish. There was a certain kind of stiffness in their conversations after that, though no one spoke about it. They had grilled fish with herbs that smelled heavenly and was just as delicious. If Will saw his dad lounging in a wooden chair in front of a static tele fingers deep in a tumbler in the evening, he pretended that the day had ended at the side of the brook, his father and him looking out at the rippling waters, grateful in each other’s company.

****

“Good morning, Will.”

Will startled out of his stupor and sat up quickly. Too quickly because he had a creak in his neck and his head felt like it was stuffed with wool. He still had papers strewn across the glass table, with all of his references and books haphazardly scattered about. He didn’t realize when he had fallen asleep on the couch, and didn’t even know when Dr. Lecter had returned from his conference in Minnesota. He quickly wiped away the half-wet drool cooling on his cheek absolutely mortified and praying to any gods who listened to not let Dr. Lecter notice it.

He scrambled to stand up, but on his haste, dropped a folder full of drafts on the floor and hurriedly gathered it back inside.

“I’m- I’m terribly sorry Dr. Lecter! I didn’t realise when I had fallen asleep. My paper is due today and I was – I’ll clear all of it away in 5 minutes.”

As he began to pile up the things accordingly, Dr. Lecter walked up to the couch, his bare feet against the softest and lush carpets of the floor burning the image of it into Will’s mind and he paused momentarily to take in the slender and arching bones of his feet. They were just as beautiful as the rest of the man, and somehow more elegant ; as if it belonged to a ballet dancer or a gymnast. Thoughts of Dr. Lecter in tights gracefully nailing a *fouette* filled his mind and he missed to pick up the markers thrice that had fallen down to the floor before he finally did and vindictively stuffed it inside the case.

“It’s alright Will. This is as much your home as it is mine and you will not be punished to have dozed off in the couch instead of your bed. Though I do wonder if you found something lacking in your room.”

Will had just woken up and his sleep – addled mind was certainly not ready for the good doctor’s deep voice uttering ‘punished' with the alluring accent of his so early on. But he whipped back the reins of his mind cruelly and held on to it for dear life. He was not going to make a fool of himself in front of him. He wasn’t a hormone- driven teenager anymore, for gods sake!

“No. I just couldn’t concentrate. When did you come back?” He stood up and felt his heart constricting painfully in his chest. Dr. Lecter was dressed in his most casual attire he had ever seen him in : a red turtleneck sweater that accentuated his collarbones underneath the material, so cozy that Will wanted to reach out and touch to feel its softness , and a brown loose trousers that hung just about the hips so masterfully that Will swallowed dryly.

God!

He must have taken a shower because he smelled strongly of sandalwood and rosewater and there were dews at the skin of his neck that peeked out of the sweater delectably. If Will didn’t know better, he’d almost accuse Dr. Lecter for torturing him to death by being so carelessly desirable.

“Just over an hour ago. The conference concluded sooner than I had expected and I took the next flight available.”

His eyes were light and there were creases at the corners of his eyes that spoke of his quiet amusement. Will narrowed his eyes.

“What?”

Dr. Lecter brought his hand up to the side of his right cheek and the small skin that met his ear and his thumb grazed tenderly on the stubble that grew over in the two days he had been busy with the paper.
Will had almost forgotten to breathe. He didn’t care that he was only wearing a faded t-shirt that had too many holes and threads coming away from it, practically falling apart at the seams, and just his boxers to hide his dignity. He lived for these moments of equal parts kindness and a special brand of cruelty that only Dr. Lecter could conjure. He knew how tactile he was, always touching the back of his shoulder to reassure Will, a light touch on his elbow as they passed each other in the kitchen when he stayed over in this house, always standing so close to him that he could breathe in his warmth. But Dr. Lecter was careful with the direct touches he’d allow himself. They were always reserved for when Will was having a Bad Day, or when he was dying for a case Jack had brought to them.

So Will was completely taken by Dr. Lecter’s gesture, hating himself just a little for leaning into the touch and just strong enough not to close his eyes with how great it felt. Will’s eyes bored into Dr. Lecter’s and he was greeted with his own reflecting back. He hated how he couldn’t quiet see what Dr. Lecter really thought, his eyes never giving anything away. It was

also a blessing for those days when Will needed a paddle to ground himself to reality, to only see what he was and nothing more.

Something quick and dark passed over in Dr. Lecter's eyes and Will's lips parted in response. The good doctor's eyes tracked his movement and Will inhaled sharply.

But then the moment passed and Dr. Lecter drew back, as he always did. Will felt decentralised and he fixed his stare on the cuffs of his sweater.

"You had missed a spot." Dr. Lecter said with a smile in his voice and Will winced.

"Thanks a bunch." Will doled out dryly and made for the washroom to hide from the embarrassment.

"Would you like some coffee, Will? I'll be making scones too."

Will turned, frowning. "What's the time?"

"2 : 45 in the morning, I believe." Dr. Lecter replied airily.

"You don't have to go through so much-"

"Making food is never a chore, Will. Not when you have the pleasure of a good company. And it's never too late for coffee, I've been summarily informed."

Will grinned. " Yeah? Who ever told you must be smart."

Hannibal returned it with a slight tilt of his head. "I defer to his finer observations."

He felt his ears catching fire and ducked his head while pointedly walking easily to the washroom. Will shut the door behind him and rubbed the bridge of his nose in frustration. Things were becoming much harder to ignore and avoid. He didn't know how he should

broach the subject with Dr. Lecter. For gods sake he couldn't even call the man by his name without turning a shameful shade of red due to his teenage years fantasizing of all the ways that name would sound when he'd call it out as his soulmate would be so deep within him that they'd be inseparable.

Dr. Lecter never really had shown any interests in him apart from the teasings and occasional looks that would burn him down to his core only to rebirth him from those ashes. He would be so polite and formal in the next moment that Will would worry if he was losing his mind and had just dreamt up those moments of intensity that promised sinful things to him. He didn't know if he dated. Wouldn't be wrong if he did. Will knew that being soulmates didn't mean you were right for each other. It just meant that you were compatible in certain ways that'd make you a good team. In his line of studies, he had come across various cases where soulmated couples broke up, or chose to live differently because things that were different between them turned out to be more pressing than those that were optimum. He knew acquaintances who were soulmates but decided to remain good friends. And on his way of becoming a forensic professor, he knew that the highest rate of homicides were between soulmated pairs.

Will wanted to believe that Dr. Lecter did all of this out of the kindness of his heart and because he knew his dad from childhood. But his stubborn heart couldn't help but argue that a man just being a good friend and a philanthropist didn't have to do as much as Dr. Lecter did for him. He practically gave him his own damn house to live in! Paid the debts to release his actual home in Wolf Trap, and gifted it to him on the promise that he would allow Will to pay it back it to him once he was comfortable. Why did he went out of his way to make things so easy for Will if he didn't expect anything in return. Why did he make Will so important, cancelling his lecture at Stanford just so he could take care of Will when he had fallen ill. He didn't understand Dr. Lecter though he would bet he knew the man more than any of his snivelling and attention seeking colleagues who'd wax poetic about Dr. Lecter's cheekbones if the former didn't find such blatant and crude praise so distasteful.

All these thoughts had finally managed to calm his blood down from steaming point and he looked down gratefully to see the bulge subsiding. He turned on the sleek golden faucet and peered into the mirror and froze in horror.

His messy hair resembled a crow's nest in the way it was sticking out in knots every each way. There were sleep dust glaringly evident in his red, beady eyes and a mortifying white track at the side of his mouth. He groaned loudly and wanted to disappear inside the ground

and never come out. No wonder Dr. Lecter didn't show any outright interest in him. He was already a mess without all of that drama.

****

A chill wind blew past him, messing up his already troubled hair and Will ducked his chin inside the floral scarf that sat snug and warm around his neck, breathing in its clean scent. Dr. Lecter had bought it for him in the previous Christmas all wrapped up in important and expensive black box with a name that he could hardly pronounce. In spite of its tag, the thing was actually very useful to have around, being comfortably thick and fluffy. Not that he really enjoyed fluffy but lately he had developed a liking for soft and comfortable things. He had taken the bus today because his car was in need of repairs and he still had some more savings to do to take it to a shop. He had got off a stop early because he couldn't function properly like a human being until he had a healthy dose of run-of-the-mill coffee. He ordered his regular black coffee with two sugars and took one extra with some whipped cream for Beverley and was on his way to walking towards the campus when he sensed something ominous.

He stopped and turned around to see a petite woman in a brown coat and curly red hair putting something away hurriedly in her side bag. Will could feel a migraine coming his way and he only hoped that what he was dreading wasn't actually true. He picked up his pace and marched towards the gateway that was only a couple of yards away when he heard the unmistakable clicks of heel on gravel gaining ground behind him.

"Hey! Excuse me, hey! Graham? You're Will Graham right? I'm Freddie Lounds -"

"Oh, I know who you are."

He really should walk on. He had a ID and she didn't.

There was no way she could come inside the campus.

His legs paused mid stride and he chugged on the coffee so that his tongue burnt.

She rounded him and have him what he was sure one of her best weapons : a mouthful of shimmery smile.
She was a striking woman, what with her uproarious hair and the way she dressed that decidedly didn't make her blend in with the normal crowd, Will knew that she was only bad news because he had literally read some of the worst and misinformed pieces of 'news' on her blog that made him frown until his eyes hurt.

"Colour me surprise. What are the odds that I'll *stumble* across one of the hottest topics of my recent article when I was out scouting for more clues."

"They are certainly slim when one has a rather *unfortunate penchant* for following people into places which isn't a part of their business."

Freddie Lounds gave a smile which was all teeth, arching a thin brow and narrowing her eyes.

"You know, you were very hard to find out. Jack Crawford had tucked you away like a fine piece of china that he only takes out when very important guests show up. Tell me, Will. Is the one who sew a child into the swings of a local playground a very important guest?"

Will really shouldn't say anything. He really should just walk away. But the way Freddie uttered each word dripping with sickly sweet smugness and disdain made Will want to say something shockingly horrible to her. To shake her out of the poise that she so prided herself in.

"No comment." He tried to walk past her but Freddie blocked his path, looking into her bag and taking out a picture and holding it out to him to see.

"It's a pretty neat photo, I must say. That raincoat of yours really brings out your baby blue eyes."

He clenched his teeth. It was taken at the crime scene, he was just staring off to a side, the swing wasn't actually visible but a portion of Jack's grim face was frozen just behind Will's shoulders looking towards the place where the murderer had poised the boy.

"You can tear it off but I'm sure you know people have digital copies of such things."

"You can be arrested for trespassing into an active investigation and on a count of obstructing

justice Miss Lounds. I'm sure you know that is considered as a binding offence."

Freddie gave him a wide-eyed innocent look as she kept the photo back into her bag.

"I really want to wait patiently for when Jack wants me to run the exclusive scoop on this bad boy. But you know how...sensational a case of this magnitude is. Children are just something so pure and vulnerable, we want to protect them from any danger and at any cost. My viewers are very eager to know just what happened back there and what the Head of the Behavioural Science had to say about the perpetrator. Just imagine their shock when they'll learn that the FBI had allowed a criminal psychology major to run around in his cute raincoat playing detective when they ought to be doing their jobs."

She stepped closer, tilting her head up and fixing Will with a dare that he resolutely denied to acknowledge, instead focusing on the people ambling their way inside the campus behind her. "As a journalist, it is my duty to deliver the truth and nothing but the whole truth to my audience. Otherwise, I'd just be another money-grabbing clickbait on the second page of a google search."

"I didn't know they called the things you do journalism. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go attend a class on *psychoanalysis*."

He had already walked away from Freddie when she called out, "I know the kinds of things you do."

Will paused, his coffee forgotten as he slowly turned back.

Freddie gave him a confident smile. "People have loose lips if you just know how to pay them right. I've heard the wild guesses you make. And the other...yet unconfirmed rumours about the magic you perform. You have a unique constitution without an apparent soulmate. A very troubled past, with what your mother committing suicide and your father ghosting you out of a blue when you were what...15? I don't really have to do much to make your life irksome Mister Graham. All I'm asking for is one hour of your time with exclusive right to your story. And how you failed the screenings for a field agent because of your...mental instability -- can just remain words spoken between us."

There was a white sound ringing in his ear. He couldn't say what it was, just a sort of not-there beep that wouldn't stop ringing.

He walked towards Freddie and a part of him, a deep and dark part of him that he never, *never* allowed to fully wake up, purred in satisfaction when he saw her smile faltering and a questioning look dawning on her pretty face.

He stood inches away from her, his otherwise lanky form looming over her short stature.

He snarled which was just on the edge of being polite enough to pass as a disconcerting smile. Oh, if she had claws then he'd show her his *teeth*.

"You know Miss Lounds, it isn't very smart to antagonize someone who can get inside the minds of killers to know just what *makes them tick*. If I were you I'd be worried about which path I'd take through the woods."

Will had to give her credit because Beverley had reliably informed him that he looked intimidating when he tried to be social or was otherwise in a black mood, and now he had been channelling all his distaste for everything he found wrong about yellow journalism into his glare but after that first few moments of uncertainty, Freddie recovered soon enough to shoot him a cocky grin, the deep red of her lips bleeding across her unblemished face.

Will stalked off, cursing himself for falling for the trap Freddie laid out for him. If he was lucky, he'd actually get through most of his classes before Jack rightly chewed off his ears for blabbering to Lounds. But he wasn't too hopeful about that.

****

After the entire Tattle Crime debacle in the morning, Will had been in a very sour mood.

To top it off, his professor was absent today and even if he was suppose to submit the papers due today, his TA said that he'd be taking it himself on next week. Will and Beverley conversed in tired grunts and monosyllables because the end of the semester was near and they had shit tonnes of things they still had to finish. The coffee that he had brought for her had gone too cold and he had to chuck it into a trashcan.

He and another girl were the only occupants of this section of the library when a sudden commotion outside of the building drew his attention. He watched as the librarian sprinted out of the hall, confused and worried students looking up from what they were doing and began speaking in hushed voice. He walked down a few shelves and stopped when he saw a gaggle of students had gathered in front of the series of windows.

A pool of something terribly wrong began to sink into his stomach. His hands itched by his sides and he could feel sweat breaking out on his forehead. He could hear professors and staffs hurrying down the hallways, shouting for someone to call 911. There were indistinct chatter and loud cries. Will pushed through the crowd of people, making his way to one of the larger windows as his guts sank deeper.
He willed himself before turning to the window and asking the person in front of him to shift slightly so that he could see properly.

“Someone jumped!”

“God! Did you see that?”

“I wonder who that is. There’s just so much blood!”

“Hey! Hey, you there! Someone call for help this guy here is convulsing!”

Will was already lying in a pool of his own blood, the wounds taking shape on his sides and limbs. There was deep gash at the back of his head, and he gasped for breath. The pain was blinding. He didn’t know when it’d end. It felt like his senses were on loop, carrying the pain signals over and over again. He had fallen to the ground the way the girl was lying outside the building.

He thought of Dr. Lecter’s burning eyes as his brain finally stopped.

Chapter Four

He never believed in the conjectures and fantastical elements that surrounded the notion of soulmates.

His parents were not a bonded pair, but they suited each other perfectly. His father had been a solemn but a giving man, always preferring to spend the time he would get from his busy schedule with Mischa and himself. Hannibal couldn't say if he admired his father, he always thought he was far too gullible for his own good but he liked that his sister, *his world*, loved him so.

His mother was every inch a well-bred aristocratic heir to a sprawling business empire. She was poignant and commanding. Her smiles, when she'd offer them, were a little too rehearsed but he didn't fault her for not loving him the same way his father did. The staff of his house had been wary of him since childhood. He was said to have a mean temper that didn't exploded into a raging tantrum but something far sinister. He'd patiently wait with his dark, ungiving eyes, never taking them away from the one who had wronged him until they cowered in defeat. And if that didn't work, strange accidents in the kitchen happened every time.

Hannibal was a prodigy, a genius in the making. His father boasted about him to his acquaintances while his mother preferred to keep a watchful eye on him. Discreetly, of course. Wouldn't want Mischa to know. She was so very protective of her elder brother.

But Hannibal never believed in the romance of the soulmate phenomena because he was no longer capable of opening whatever remained of his heart to another human being after his Mischa. *Mischa*.

That wrinkled and desiccated part of him was stowed away far into the reaches of his mind, buried under the floors of his mind palace, never forgotten but cursed. He couldn't even reach it when his mind was set ablaze by the quite storm of his beloved aunt's eyes. Oh how they had trapped him in an inferno of their own, one in which he willingly climbed down, and forsake all the guidance to come back out. Hannibal was loathe to admit but he was quite

disarmed when it came to the matters of heart. Even though he had successfully pried away the affronting organ from his being, its echoes were loud enough that it still could be heard.

No. He didn’t believe in soulmates but he believed in Will Graham.

It was fate that brought them together on that day. Who knew a well-placed kick to his car by one flailing pig could land it to Will's father who ran a small, unflattering repair shop down the road which he never intended to take but had to because of the unnecessary attention the squealing had garnered. He was quite out of his element that day, he’d admit that, but couldn’t be more thankful for it because that was what brought him to Will.

He was sure he’d carry on his life just as well without ever knowing the enigma that was his soulmate, but now that he did, he couldn’t ever imagine a day in his absence. It was truly quite herculean to be what good Will needed : a source of stability and assurance, an unlikely though trustworthy friend, a mirror that only reflected everything that he was meant to be.

Now, that Will was so close to his own objective in life, Hannibal feels a certain...loss.

Will was never truly an outspoken boy. He never voiced his wants and readily accepted what was given to him. In all these years of staying together, Will had only ever asked two things from him. The latter was to allow him to pay Hannibal back for his desolate house in Virginia, and the former. Well, he was still adhering to it wasn’t he. Because Hannibal was nothing if not attentive. And dear Will deserved the entirety of his attention.

But there were the little things, negligible things that Will looked up to him for.

He’d wait shyly in the early mornings downstairs at the kitchen for Hannibal to come and make coffee and scones. It had become a routine for them, after the first couple of nights when Will woke up screaming and shaking. Will had a sweet tooth that he was extremely cautious about. He would help rounding up the papers and documents in his study when he returned home, even though he really didn’t need the help and preferred to work alone. But

Will's company was a welcome intrusion, and they often talked about the nature of time and mortality, Hannibal finding it surprising but not shocking that Will had a inclination for philosophy. Even though he wasn't honed enough to enjoy the subtleties of good art and orchestra, he still had the eye to appreciate it.

And was eager to hear about it when Hannibal explained to him.

Those quite evenings when Will would lean against the doorway watching intently and listening to every note that Hannibal's fingers eased out of the harpsichord were amongst his favourites. Will never asked about what he played or even after when it was time to retire and he'd gradually grown aware of how the younger man's eyes bore into his. Because that was what he was now. A man. Well on his way of coming into the magnificent skin that Hannibal had just envisioned but not realized.

But he was a patient man. And just as those light brushes against his hand on the way upstairs, Will's little gestures spoke volumes and it was nearly the time to cultivate the urges he had seen into the inspirations that they truly were.

He would not say that he missed Will's wide-eyed naivety when he was enrolled in to the best educational institution, or the pleased relief in his smiles when Hannibal acknowledged the milestones he achieved. He didn't really miss how Will would wait for Hannibal to feed him the best dishes exclusively procured and lovingly made because he adored the soft exultation falling from his lips as he ate, knowing that he could provide Will what he needed.

Now he had friends, a part-time job that he loved, a career well on its way of becoming a reality and plans to move out from Hannibal's home to Wolf Trap, Virginia. He wasn't the only one Will went to share his troubles to. He was aware of Beverley Katz and what she meant for him. A first good friend that he had in decades of growing up. He appreciated what she had done for Will. But he couldn't help but relish in the fact that no matter how close they grew, Will would never truly open up to her. Or anyone for that matter. He was a highly private individual and it had taken Hannibal careful, meticulous attention to get Will talk about the dreams that he was the most possessive about. If Will had something that he despised sharing, it was his dreams. Will had only ever confided to him about them on very rare occasions, times that he had carefully hung in the galleries in his mind palace, vibrant and exuberant.
It only seemed natural for Hannibal to nudge certain things in a specific way that would help Will out in the long run. He was nothing if not helpful.

"Loin served with Cumberland paste of red fruits."

The swell of the classical music filled the dining room with expectant energy. Hannibal

spread the thick red paste delicately on the slices and satisfied with his artwork proceeded to pour the same on his own.

“Loin, uh – what loin?” Jack asked already impressed by the theatricality of the meal laid out before him, the delicious smell that wafted out churned the hunger deep inside of him.

“Pork.” The good doctor replied.

“Ah. Well, I’ve never really had the opportunity to eat home-cooked meals. Both my wife and I work and as much as I tried not to, I ended up marrying my mother.” Hannibal shot a quick smile and donned on his suit jacket.

“Your mother didn’t cook?”

“She did, she did.” Jack took a healthy bite and immediately groaned in pleasure.

“*This*. This is very good Dr. Lecter.”
Hannibal smiled.

“Next time, bring your wife with you Jack. I’d love to have you both for dinner.”

Jack nodded in acquiescence and took another bite.

“When I was small my mother would feed me one of her own recipes : she’d call it ‘oriental noodles', it was mostly made of spaghetti, ham and a lot of greens. I was quite thin when I was young.”

Hannibal smiled around his mouthful, carefully taking time to relish in the burst of flavours and washing it down by the burn of his wine.

“Have you looked into the documents I’ve send to you?”

“Yes. Your notes on the former patient of yours is quite helpful. Though the case was officially solve, it is undeniable that the murder committed in Parkland has some rather troubling similarities with the string of three murders 10 years ago. There is a possibility that another crime in a town just a few miles over might also be connected with this.”

“And you plan on taking Will there?”

Jack chewed the thought over his next bite, his eyes doubtful.

“When people have the sort of constitution that Will has, it becomes all too difficult to distinguish between wakefulness and nightmares. I do understand that Dr. Lecter. You yourself had stated that he naturally has too many mirror neurons, an empathy disorder. It already makes him vulnerable to the darker machinations of troubled minds. Will believes in his ability to do good and so do I. But the things he has too see, to feel... it changes a person. And I know how Will is. He will never let anyone know the things that goes inside his head. And after the Shrike, I am...wary about his mental health.”

“You are quite correct to worry Jack. What happened four months ago, its echoes still haunt Will in his waking hours. I have done everything short of professional requirements to help Will come to terms with that trauma. Even though he wilfully denies to being bothered about everything that transpired that day, he is deeply shaken by it. But not changed. Will...is made of a sense of morality that even I find unique. He believes in something with every inch of his being and he never relents. To him, the world is not divided into black and white but what shouldn’t be done and ought to be done. Even if he suffers under the nightmarish visions, he will always find his way back to the shore.”

Jack took a long sip from his glass and nodded.

“But his lack of experience leaves him open. He looked more shaken than usual last time, Dr. Lecter. I’ve seen him tortured and I’ve seen him in pain. But the moment he resurfaced from enacting the death of the victim, he was confused. It was as if he didn’t know who he was. You’ve seen it.”

“I have.”

“What does it say about Will then?”

“You think you’ve broken Will. Is it because you find it difficult to trust in his mental stability or is it that you fear you will lose him to the right cause?"

Jack paused, fixing Hannibal with a inscrutable look and Hannibal leaned back in his chair, chasing the taste of accomplishment with the wine.

“Are you asking if I have lost someone to this work, Dr. Lecter? Yes – I have. But you being the official guardian of Will on account of being his soulmate, I need to be transparent with you. What I do, bringing Will to ongoing investigations without him being legally qualified for it is tremendous risk. Even when he consulted via the crime scene photos, I was putting my neck on the line. I need it to be perfectly guaranteed that Will will not break under the strains of this case or the next that would come after. Do you think Will should be kept on this case, Dr. Lecter?”

All the pieces were falling into places where they were supposed to. Jack Crawford had willingly walked into the trials and it was only a matter of time if he would be hailed for the sacrifices he made at the altar, or persecuted.

Hannibal’s fingers imperceptibly clicked on the stem of the glass as the music reached its crescendo and he had to close his eyes to contain the unnamed emotions that blossomed inside his chest. It was finally time, when the curtains rose and the show began.

Will you see me Will, the way I see you?”

He opened his eyes, shining with a glean of unshed tears and his lips parted in the anticipation of it all.

“Will is the mongoose I want inside my house when the snakes slither by, Jack. He is more than a fine piece of china, not as delicate as you fear him to be. I’m confident in his abilities to see the innocent children involved in this heinous crime to justice. He’s just as much a broken pony as you consider yourself to be.”

Jack chuckled, the tension in the room dissipating in the soft tinkling of the cutlery as they ate together.
“I’ve already had my psych eval, Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal’s eyes shone in the subdued atmosphere of the dining room. If Jack was a wise man, he’d see the shadows that played across his face as the foreshadows that they were. But Jack was not a wise man. He was a good man.

“Not by me.” Hannibal raised his glass and Jack laughed, raising his in return.

And the game begins

****

His feet were sticky as he struggled to keep pace.
*He couldn't look down, **he won't look down**, he must reach the safety of his house as fast as his straw legs could carry. The weight in his hands, cradled so lovingly -- **so possessively** -- to his chest, was heavy and unmoving. He didn't think about it. The outdoor light shone like a beacon promising warmth, security and healing. That was all he wanted. Everything would be fine once they reached inside. The balmy chillness of the summer night wouldn't be so obstructing. The sky overheard was bruised and blackened. He was disappointed there were no stars. She'd love to see the constellations.*

Grasses and bushes ate at his feet, some reaching up to his knees. The wetness of his clothes spread alarmingly but he still didn't look down.

Suddenly there was a long bang and Will flinced. His steps faltered and he looked around himself to finally realise that there was nothing but darkness. The house he thought he could see before him was no longer there. And the weight in his arm disappeared.
He let out a noise that was suspended perpetually in between a scream and a cry. He looked down and all that remained were small bones, few of them had been gnawed on down to the marrow.
There were more bangs and he did scream then, falling to his knees.
Something splashed across his face and he stared wide-eyed at the unseeing face of a girl with dirty blond hair matted with blood and brain matter. A sharp sting on the side of his head drew his attention and he reached there with his hand. Fingers stained with blood and fleshy chunks dripped from them to the endless abyss.
Oh!
His throat closed up. He choked. His eyes watered. Everything was pain. Everything was pain.
The girl's murky eyes stared into his own and her blackened mouth opened in a horrible maw.
*"**SEE. SEE***
DO YOU SEE?"

He gasped awake, his lungs fluttering inside his chest like caged birds. His vision swam and he had to take large, gulping breaths to even begin to get his erratic heart to settle. The first thing he noticed was the steady beep coming from his side. The walls were of a neutral colour, and there were machines flickering with different light, whirring softly. Tubes came out of his arms. He flexed them slowly.

The hospital room strongly smelled of medicines and cleaning detergent and it alone made him nauseated. He hated hospitals with a burning passion. There were all too many eyes

desperate to seek searching ones and way too many people counting days on their fingers for him to relax.

But he was all too preoccupied by the fact that the head on the bed was no others but Dr. Lecter's. He was crouched over to the bed, the chair drawn as close to it as it would allow. The position must be awkward and uncomfortable but Dr. Lecter seemed to be deep asleep. How long was he here? What actually had happened?

Oh.

He remembered. The girl.

His fingers felt stiff and the IV was not a joy to have, but he wasn't going to let this opportunity pass.

His fingers found the soft bangs of his ashen blond hair, Will almost in disbelief that he was truly touching the older man. His heart raced and not to catch his breath this time. He ran his fingers carefully through the hair, satisfaction blooming into his chest when he felt the man lean into the touch.
But the position must be too uncomfortable because Dr. Lecter moved and then promptly sat back. His eyes were not the cold, indifferent facade he was so used to. Will was surprised that Dr. Lecter chose to let his mask slip just so. There was worry easily discernible in them. But even more so there was a glint of something else. Something that he couldn't quite grasp at but which made knots to form in his stomach.

"Will," Dr. Lecter breathed and the tension that Will didn't realise he was holding in finally found a fissure.

"Dr. Lecter." He croaked out, his fingers clutching on air. The older man's hand quickly wrapped around Will's and held tightly.

"You had a long nap."

Will frowned.

"You've been asleep for almost 18 hours. I came as soon as I was informed."

Will blinked owlishly. 18 hours? And he still felt as if he'd been thrown off a roof.

He paused. And sighed.

“It never took so long before. Almost 30 to 40 minutes max. Have the wounds sealed?” Talking felt like so much effort but he had to drive his attention somewhere other than the disturbing dream he just had. More so than the usual really. He couldn’t think back to the last time his dreams were short of nightmare fuel stuffs. He supposed he should call them nightmares. But he had grown so used to them by now that if just felt like regular stuffs. But not this dream. He didn’t feel like himself. But he could feel the person be was suppose to be. Taste the desperation and madness like honeydew in the air. He couldn’t fathom the intensity of the tempest that raged on inside the head which wasn’t his own but it was all so achingly familiar that he hurt only by remembering it.

“You’re bleeding again.”

And he was. The wounds on his head reopened and blood started pouring down. The hospital drab that he was wearing quickly soaked through and Will groaned.

“I’ll get the nurse.”

Will’s hand wrapped around Dr. Lecter’s like a vice. The man paused, halfway up the chair, his eyes calculating but soft.

“Don’t. Stay here.”

Will had scrunched up his eyes in an effort to breathe through the pain of dying all over again and could on hear the chair dragging across the floor to know that Dr. Lecter had sat down.

“I’m right here, Will. I will not go anywhere.”

He nodded his head. Or tried to at least. This time it was taking too long to recede. The effects of the victim’s death only took an hour to two to fade away completely. And within three to four hours he’d be fine, his body gaining back the blood that was lost.

“Don’t worry Will. This is slightly unusual, yes but not completely out of bounds. Deaths like this have always been more challenging for you to recover from. I’m sorry that you had to be there. But it will pass.”

Will fell quiet. He listened to the droning of the machine, the constant whirring of their metallic parts working in tandem to remain efficient. He wondered if his insides too sounded somewhat similar. So many soft, squishy parts working systematically to keep each other functioning. Never taking a break.

“I met you before.”

Will didn’t look up from the patch of wall to his left where his eyes were trained. The hand within his remained tight.

“When do you mean?"

Suddenly the door to the room slammed open and Beverley stumbled inside with a flurry of coat and bags. She stopped, her eyes going from Will who stared at her equally shocked and then to Dr. Lecter who offered her a kind smile.

“Heya Dr. Lecter.” She managed to say while trying to be calmed about everything. Will's blood soaked clothes obviously didn’t help.

“Miss Katz. Hope your sister is no longer getting into trouble.”

Beverley laughed and waved her hand. “God, no! Your advise does work miracles Dr. Lecter. She was genuinely afraid I’ll take away her collectibles.”

Dr. Lecter looked between Beverley and Will amusedly. Then turning towards Beverley he asked, “Would you like some coffee? I was just going to pour Will one. Though I have left the cups in my car, I’m afraid.”

“Oh. If it’s not too much trouble, then sure.”

“None at all. Will, I’ll also call the nurse on my way out.” And then he leisurely walked out of the room, leaving an apprehensive Will and an annoyed Beverley together.

“*A constitution?!*”

Will sighed. He wanted to sit up but he feared he'd get blood all over himself if he did so he laid back.

"And one that makes you bleed the way that anyone dies near you?! Will! When were you going to tell me this?"

"Possibly never if it could be helped."

Beverley wagged a finger at Will, her brows furrowed in righteous betrayal.

"I was always talking to you about crime scenes, and serial killers and all the while you didn't think it would be wise to let me know that you might begin to bleed on me if I ever showed you any of the victim's photos? Is this why you failed the screenings?"

"Yes."

"Will,"

"What Bev?"

"...Are you okay?"

Will sighed again and motioned for her to sit in the chair beside him.

"I'm fine Bev," Will began "these wounds would stay only for a couple of hours. And the blood I lose is easily replenished. I'm okay. Don't worry about it."
Beverley levelled him her 'I know you're bullshiting but I'll let it pass' glare and then sighed, gingerly taking in the blood that still drizzled slowly from his side.

"God, Graham! You're a mess. Do I even wanna know who your soulmate is? It's not Chilton is it?"

Will probably would've renounced Beverley from his friendship if it weren't for the fact that she was the same shade of green speaking it as he was.

“No. I’ve been spared that pain, thankfully.”

“You ought to sacrifice to the old gods and dance around naked on a full moon to thank them for it. Chilton would’ve loved to have his sweaty hands all over your pretty head if it were the case.”

“That’s why I’m an orphan. It was the price that was demanded from me. Also, I didn’t have to get butt naked.”

Beverley rolled her eyes so hard Will worried if it wouldn’t be stuck that way.

“You’re such a little shit Will.”

“I try. But Bev, there’s something I want to ask.”

“What is it?"

“Who was the girl?”

“Will...I really don’t think I should tell this.”

“Please. I have to know. It feels...there’s just something off about the entire thing.”

“I don’t know a lot, but her name was Georgia Madchen. She was in her class, quiet and reserved. I don’t think I’ve ever heard her speak.”

The name didn’t ring any bell but Will couldn’t shake off the feeling that there was something off about the whole situation. He suddenly felt very exhausted. His limbs felt leaden and he let out a soft groan.
“Will? Are you not feeling okay?”

“No..I-um. I guess I just need to sleep more.”

“Yeah. You should. I’ll come visit again tomorrow. I’ll bring glazed donuts for you if you behave.”

“Thanks Mom.”

“Eat shit Graham.”

“Mmm"

“Tell Dr. Lecter I’ll grab that coffee next time around. I really have to go and pick up my sis from school.”

“Will do.”

Beverley left and ten minutes later the nurse came in, clicking her tongue in distaste and quickly helped him change and dressed his wounds. Dr.Lecter walked through the door just when the nurse was done and Will raised a brow at him. He shot a charming smile and a pleasant thank you to the nurse whose bad mood disappeared instantaneously. Will didn’t scoff at all.

Dr. Lecter returned a mischievous quirk of his lips and handed him a steaming cup of home brewed coffee.

“Miss Katz left?”

“Yeah. She had to pick up her sister. Said she’ll grab it next time around.”

“I see.”

“You could’ve stayed you know.”

“Of course. But you needed to talk with her without my presence looming over you.”

Will grinned around his mouthful of delicious coffee. “So you agree you loom.”

“Caught red handed. But I’m afraid you must keep yourself awake for a while longer. Jack wants to speak with you.”

Shit.

Will took the phone proffered to him and held it to his ears.

“’It isn’t smart to antagonize someone who can get inside the minds of killers to know just what makes them tick.”’

Shit.

Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

Okay, so couple of things I want to say first for those who want to know.

I'M COMPLETELY BLOWN AWAY by THE RESPONSE YOU PEOPLE SHOWED THIS FIC THANK YOU THANK YOU SOOO MUCH!!!!!! everyone who kudosed and commented and bookmarked and subscribed and just read this mess of a story that I'm eking out, thank you a lot. It really means a lot to me.

And secondly, I'm sorry for the long gap. Things have been happening in my life and i don't really have this all planned out. I'll try being more consistent with my updates but rest assured, I'll not abandon this fic, no matter how much time it takes me.

And lastly, almost everything here is made up. I know things don't work in real life as I've written them here but it's just something I'm writing for fun for all of us. I hope there's nothing too much distracting here.

And that's it for the long ass note, get on with the story!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What were you thinking Will?!”

Will was suitably chastised sitting sullenly before Jack as he stared down at him across his desk.

They were in the Quantico office, and Will might have been elated at any other time about being able to step inside the place where he dreamed of working as a teacher, but Jack's disapproving eyes were enough to drill a sense of abject embarrassment into Will for not having enough self restraint. And what was even worse that he had an audience to witness the embarrassment first hand. He couldn’t understand if it was better that Dr. Lecter was here as well or if it only made everything that much worse.

He had stopped bleeding long enough for him to actually wear clothes without ruining them and the wounds were mostly gone, leaving behind only phantom stings of unease. Jack had left no room for any objections after the doctors cleared that Will was fit to go. While on the drive here to Quantico, Will couldn't help but to feel this suspicious nagging that Dr. Lecter was secretly amused by the blunder Will had done. He didn't shoot a sidelong glance at the good doctor sitting to his right lest he angered Jack any further.

"You were supposed to feign ignorance and walk right into your classes Will. Not stand there and give ammunition to a sensational journalist!"

"I did try to dodge her but she was persistent Jack."

"Well your trying wasn't good enough evidently! What we do here is not a common knowledge Will. And if the news of your involvement with the cases get aired out in the public, it is not only I who will have to face consequences. Dr. Lecter, were you aware of this?"

"He's not in charge of me!"

"Please, Jack. You may call me Hannibal. And I believe that Will has the insight to know what is and isn't best for him."

Jack narrowed his eyes and leaned forward. "You enabling this kind of recklessness in Will is counterproductive, Hannibal."

"Fine. Then I'll be leaving seeing how you're content talking about me without needing me here."

"*Sit your ass down Graham!*"

"*Gentlemen*," Alana smiled wryly turning in the chair to face Will. She gave a reassuring smile, her face brightening with that little movement and Will ducked his head feeling his ears catching fire. "Let's not become children. I understand that Will has made a miscalculation with Miss Lounds but I believe that she'd have published this article with or without your blessings Jack. It's already obvious that she has wormed her way inside your team to know things that weren't meant for her to know. I suggest you look into that as soon as you can."

Jack wasn't pleased by that but he was hardly going to argue with Alana Bloom when she looked at you in the way that promised retribution if not acceded. And Jack knew when to push beyond what was needed and when to stop. Alana's soft grin was all the indication that was needed to see that she had won this round. It didn't help that she was particularly annoyed at Jack when he decided against her advise to bring Will into active crime scenes. But he had assured her that Will wasn't going to stray too far under his protection. And he had Dr Lecter as the cushion if anything were to happen.

"I believe Alana is right Jack. Miss Lounds seemed to be aware of his constitution. And *that* was hardly a piece of information you let her have."

Will did look up then and found him glancing between Jack and Alana with a merry smile on his face.

God. He was actually amused by this. That bastard.

Jack shot an unimpressed glance at Alana and then to Will, sighed and chugged the glass of amber liquid kept aside.

"There's been another one in County Falls. The victim was 11 year old Nathaniel Darren. He was found poised under a sycamore tree in the backyard of his own house."

"That's gutsy. And no one heard a thing?" Alana asked, disturbed.

Jack shook his head. "The child wasn't supposed to be at the house. He had a sleepover with another boy a couple of blocks down. There were no blood on the crime scene. No sign of any forced entry, no broken windows or door. The same goes for the friend's house. They didn't even realize that the boy was gone until Nathaniel's mother called them in the next morning after discovering...him."

Hannibal hummed. "He's already moved on. Became more confident in his trade, so much so that he felt comfortable bringing back his victim to the place which was supposed to be secure and safe."

"But that's too soon." Alana said, sitting upright in the chair. "If the murder at Central Park was his first then he shouldn't have escalated so quickly. Perpetrators who generally go for victims who are physically weaker than them mostly act out their aggression and to kill the child and then being him back to his home requires a level of methodical planning which must be absent given he is just trying out his hands."

“Then this wasn’t his second time.” Will murmured not looking up from his hands clasped in his laps. A little boy tucked carefully under a tree just outside of his home. He was returned to his home and not his friend’s because... “The killer knew Nathaniel. He knew him well enough to know that he was having a sleepover with his friend. Why not bring him back to the house that he found him in if not for the fact that he knew it wasn’t his house.”

Jack looked on impassively, his brows bore down heavily on his weathered face.

“I’ll sent Zeller to hand you over the case files. I want you to look through them carefully for any clue which might give us anything to find this son of a bitch. Pardon my French.” He added dryly, and Alana raised her brow.

“And what reason do I serve on this evening Jack.” She asked, uncrossing her legs and then crossed them on the opposite side, the elegant arch of her calf peeking out of the deep maroon dress she wore sending nervous flutters inside Will’s stomach and he pried away his gaze and fixed it on the paperweight resting on Jack's desk.

“After Will’s had a look into both Jeremy and Nathaniel’s files, I want you to walk him through the Johnson case.”

A concerned look fell upon her face. “Johnson? Peter Johnson? But why...you think these murders have something to do with what Johnson did all those years ago.”

“I am not yet ready to think anything at all but I want to be sure. Price has confirmed that the same type of weapon that was used to almost decapitate Jeremy was also used to partially decapitate Nathaniel. There are same lacerations on both of their chest and abdomen, and both of them have their eyes missing.”

“Jesus...” Alana breathed out.

Will didn’t know about the entire decapitation thing or about the eyes being gouged out. They must have been after the victims were killed. And things had been murky at the crime scene, he had been too overwhelmed by the aftershock of the death that he hadn't really seen the body.Even after slitting their throats, the killer felt the need to go at their necks again, to carve out their eyes. Why? Why did you feel that need? What didn’t you want them to see?

“But Jack, this and Johnson have nothing in common. I mean apart from the places that these children have been killed, there are no other similarities. Johnson strangled his victims after which he proceeded to sexually assault them. Here, these murders have been predominantly led by the intent of inflicting violence. And the killer is careful as well. He leaves no evidence behind, not a single hair, and he works silently in hours of night. Johnson was a pig headed mullet all but announcing to the world the things he’d done to those poor boys.”

Jack listened, his fingers rubbing at a rough patch of his beard. He nodded his head then, and looked at Dr Lecter.

“Will you accompany Will when he goes to see Johnson?”

“Jack!”

“I’ve already talked with Dr Chilton and he has expressed his willingness to assist us, under full disclosure, of course. But given that he can become too excitable regarding certain...topics, I’d feel relieved if you went along with Will, Hannibal.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea Jack. Johnson is a vile man and Will deserves to stay as far away from him as possible.”

“Will needs all the pieces of the puzzle in order to give me the insight I want Alana. I know your concern for him is reasonable but he must be able to face the monsters first before he went looking for them.”

Alana leaned forward, her beautiful red lips pressed thinly and her bright brown eyes alit with indignation and anger on Will’s behalf.

“The last time you sent Will chasing after a monster ill – prepared, he almost died.”

Silence fell over them heavy as a fog. Alana's eyes were trained at Jack accusingly, almost daring him to spew any excuse so that she could gladly rip it apart systematically. Jack returned her stare with one of his unmoving and righteous arch of brow, the lines on his face set in stones. And Dr Lecter only looked on with keen interest disguised as mere amusement.

Will knew for a fact that underneath all his fretting when he had got his face beaten in and his mild admonishing when he tended to his busted knuckles, the older man was pleased with how that afternoon at the Hobbs had unfolded. Killing Garret Jacob Hobbs might be something that he'd probably never get over but seeing Dr Lecter's face as he came upon the aftermath, breathless and almost unorganised, the face of his loud relief but quiet satisfaction remained clearer than anything in his mind.

He hadn't given much of a thought to that. Slipping and shuddering through his miserable attempt at saving the bleeding out girl had occupied his mind then, and then after that, the ghost of a smug Garret Jacob Hobbs smirking with his missing teeth and bloodied face, daring Will to even think about a peaceful sleep.

"I'll be fine."

Will's voice cut through the tense atmosphere and he breathed around the terse fit of his own skin. He nodded his head and then stood up, sure and shaken but in control.

"I am...sorry. For how poorly I handled the Lounds situation. But I'll be careful. Now, Jack, if you'll excuse me, I have classes to attend."

Will walked out holding his head high. He didn't spare any glance to either Dr Lecter or Alana. As soon as he heard the click of the door behind him, a shallow breath left him and his hands went to the side of his head, almost dreading to find blood there. But he sighed in relief when there was none. He ran his fingers through the curls of his hair, thinking about getting a coffee before he went to the academy. He had reached his car when he heard Alana calling out to him.

He stopped and turned, feeling a pleasant warmth spreading through his bones as he saw her smile back at him, a little out of breath but lovely nonetheless.

"You got a mean pair of legs on you."

"I just don't have a disadvantage."

"I'll be careful calling my heels a disadvantage, Will." She winked.

"I'm sorry, Alana. And not for the shoes... but for...dragging you in there."

“You didn’t drag me anywhere I wasn’t willing to go Will. And I had conversations with Johnson. I know the kind of man he is and the type of crimes he committed but he was nothing special. Not enough to inspire someone else.”

Will tilted his head in acquiescence. She stared at him for a moment and then tucked a lock of her hair behind her ear.

“I just want you to be sure Will. Jack doesn’t know what restraint is even if it smacked him on his face. You have to be sure if this is truly something you want.”

“I know Alana, but believe me. I am sure. I can help save lives doing what I do. And that’s not something I’d change.”

Alana's eyes crinkled in the way that meant she was unhappy but wasn’t going to argue further. Having known her for almost the same amount of time as he had Dr Lecter, it sometimes felt that she was more his friend than what he was to her. He forgot that she had been a student of the older man when he was at John Hopkins, even before Will had come into the scene, and she had always treated him with same variety of care and tutelage as one would their sibling. Even though she didn’t have to, she came to check up on him as much as she could to make sure he was doing fine dealing with the baggage that came when your only semblance of a family abandoned you, leaving you broke and in debts. She was kind and pleasant and beautiful. Sometimes more approachable than his own soulmate because she didn’t feel as if she were a timeless centrepiece of something primeval and powerful, unworthy of common touch.

But he had always been someone that Alana felt she needed to protect and shelter.

He was always being saved by someone whether he knew it or wanted it.

“I won’t go too far Alana. You know me. I’ll always come back.”

Alana chuckled, no doubt remembering his idiotic attempt to runaway from Dr Lecter because of a nightmare he had shortly after he had moved in.
“Along with Hannibal's door mine too is open to you Will. In fact, come over for dinner this Saturday if you and Hannibal have no prior engagements. Margot wanted to properly thank you for having introduced us to each other.”

“I’ll talk to Dr Lecter.”

“I have already sent him an invitation. I wanted to know from you.”

Will couldn’t say no when she looked at him like that.
“Yeah. Yeah, I’ll come.”

A bright grin broke out on her face and she told him the time and the type of champagne he should bring along with him before leaving him in the parking lot with a tender heart and an aching head. He knew from all the records he’d wiped the layers of dust from and from the sleepless hours spent in the archives, that soulmates were a fickle thing. They morphed and changed as the individual evolved. It was very rare that soulmates remained unchanged on the flesh. Sometimes when he was feeling reckless and rebellious, really, he liked to imagine that the name penned in a masterful cursive slant on the small of his left wrist wasn’t the name that he grew up with, but of a messier but elegant crawl of a person that he’d come to love. Eventually. There were days that he felt little more than a broken mirror, only distant echoes to be heard as far as he could hear.

Soulmates weren’t important. They weren’t instrumental in shaping up a person. But they were still an itch that could never be scratched, even when you hand the hand and the reach required to do it.
Will brought his arms in front of him. Looking at them through the plaid fabric of his shirt, he rolled the sleeves up to his elbow and wasn’t relieved to find that his skin was perfectly alright, no burns, no blemishes. He still couldn’t shake off the persistent feeling of a painful itch that fired up through his body at odd times. It’d almost feel like his skin was scabbing over some old wounds that never really healed, the skin peeling away at the barest friction.

He had already missed most of his classes, though he shared a handful with Beverley, he still had the rest to catch up to. He really couldn’t afford to miss anymore classes if he wanted to graduate. With that in mind Will drove to the academy.

****

By the time he reached Coulson and Brooks, it was nearing seven in the evening.

He had been well over an hour late and though he had let Mr. Brooks know, the taste of guilt lingered unrepentant at the back of his throat. Mr. Brooks had been an acquaintance of Dr Lecter, someone who was somehow even more European than the good doctor if it was

possible, and had an accent that for the life of Will, he couldn't place. But the man was a gentle giant, his bushy sand-peppered beard only endearing him to a young Will whose first thought upon being introduced to him had been how much he resembled Hagrid from the Harry Potter series. Only that he wasn't a wizard, and most assuredly not a giant. He was a patient man who let Will linger well after the closing time of his book shop and Will's obsessive need to be useful had prompted Mr. Brooks to offer him a job at the shop, even though he managed just fine, and Will couldn't have been happier. And the mild surprise on Dr Lecter's face as he had raised a brow at Will's proud announcement only meant that he had secured that job on his own merit. Mr. Brooks was too giving for the number of hours he put in, even though the shop was a cesspool for the most haughtiest and snobiest literary curators, Will felt immensely bad whenever he became late to come at work.

He hurriedly hung his bag from the hooks over at the side and immediately set about rearranging the displaced books methodically around the shelves. When he had been half way through his work, he remembered he had forgotten to put on his badge. Cursing softly under his breath, he sprinted from the farthest corner of the shelf and almost barrelled into some poor man who had been unnoticeable prior to this.

"Oh god! I'm so sorry. Please, forgive me I wasn't looking where I was going." Will stumbled over his words, hastily crouching down and picking up the book the man was going over.

'*Flight of Freedom*' by Kent Durden.

"It's alright. I shouldn't have been standing in the middle of the store."

The man's voice was relatively young, and it lacked the upstate lilt that most of the clientele had. Will didn't meet the man's eyes but he saw that he was hardly much older than himself, wearing a casual shirt and dress pant which had wrinkles of unkempt marring it. His shoes were pricy though. Had a nice shine and was well taken care of. He distantly remembered his father quipping about how a man's character could be judged by the way he took care of his shoes. And then Will promptly frowned hard realizing he had been staring at the man's shoes for longer than necessary.

He cleared his voice, and offered the book back to the guy. Without another word, he turned, making a show of cleaning the books on the opposite shelf when the man called out, "You won't recommend me a book?"

Will paused, not turning just yet, belatedly realised again that he had been wiping the bones of the books with his hand and not a rug.

“I’m not sure what you mean, sir.”

“Oh, not ‘sir' please. That’s just too stuffy for me. I meant that almost everyone in every book store always recommend me about which book I should buy. I saw you looking at the title. I kind of sensed that you didn’t much approve of it.”

Will shrugged, taking out a volume of Cambridge history which was perfectly fine where it was and then set it back at its place again. “It’s not up to me to decide the kind of books you’d prefer. If you wanted to know my recommendations then you’d ask and I’d tell you the most generic kinds of books that’d suit your appearance. And you’d be dissatisfied with that choice because I really didn’t know what it was that you were looking for. Picking up a book is a private affair, I believe. You choose the one that resonates with you.”

The man chuckled softly behind him and Will let out a breath. Mr. Brooks always suggested that he pretended he couldn’t speak. That way he’d stay away from unnecessary arguments with half-witted people who only bought classical books because that made them look important. His sight was too overbearing in these kind of situations.

“That’s an unique answer. I wasn’t expecting that. My name’s Matthew Brown. May I know yours?”

Will hesitated for a moment and then turned, still not looking at the man properly but not being an ass.

“Will Graham.”

“Oh.”

Dread settled unpleasantly in his stomach. Not another psychiatrist, please.

“I’ve read your monologue on insect activity and how it helps determine the time of death. It was quite illuminating.”

“Uh,”

“Ah. Forgive me, I didn’t wish to make you uncomfortable. I always find myself interested in

the forensics and try to read up anything interesting that catches my eye. I only didn't expect such professional body of work from someone so young as you."

"Thanks." Will muttered, feeling trapped inside the book store with the man, *Matthew*.

"I'll buy this book." He said and Will was grateful that the line of conversation ended there.

Will took the book from the man and rang it up, packed it neatly and then handed it over to Matthew.

"Thank you for shopping with us, Mr. Brown."

"It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Graham." The man walked out of the shop, the soft ding of the bell filling the space and Will sighed. Mr. Brooks was probably in the basement tending to the rarer books in his collection which were too priceless to put up here. Will took out his laptop and began working on his paper, scratching his arms every now and then.

****

"Will, how are you feeling?"

Will looked up from his steaming bowl of silkie chicken broth and found Dr Lecter's eyes trained on him with an intensity that was far too obvious to be causal about. He always did things quite passionately, pouring himself in every little minute action and it was surprising for Will to see how little everyone who orbited around the doctor as if he were the sun incarnate missed the intensity of his emotions. But Will also knew how adept the other man was at hiding them in plain sight. It was always rewarding to be cautious whenever he did let the mask slip, even by an increment. It only meant that Will was going to end up politely storming out until he was calm enough to talk to him again. And he didn't really want to have an argument with Dr Lecter because the dinner was cozy and comfortable and he just wanted to soak up his presence like a starving sponge.

“A little shaky. But I’ll be fine.”

Dr Lecter gave an imperceptible nod and drank leisurely from his silver spoon.

“Alana expressed her happiness on the occasion that you ended up deciding to attend the gala next month.”

Will continued to slurp on his broth but he already felt the migraine sneaking up on him.

“Yeah. I’d be a fool not to.”

“She had also added how saddened she was that she could not accompany you to the gala as she is on the committee of the Parkinson scholarship. One, that Alana and most of her colleagues, believe that you might win.”

He liked Alana. He really did. But sometimes he wished that she was *his* friend and not Dr Lecter’s.

“I believe I will. It is pertinent that I do.”

The soft tinkling of the silverware against the bowl was poignant in the room. Will didn’t mind the quiet around him when he was with the other man. But now he almost fell he could jump right out of his skin. He absently scratched at the back of his elbow after keeping the spoon down, not looking up at Dr Lecter but not really casting his sight downward.

“Is there something that I have failed to provide you Will.”

The question, when it came, was so unexpected that Will’s head jerked up, his started gaze meeting the passive one of Dr Lecter.

His face was an unmarred canvas, devoid of a single wrinkle of thought.

“No. Of course not Dr Lecter. You’ve given me more than I ever needed or wanted. More than I deserved.”

“You deserve this world, Will.”

The quite assertion in the other man's voice was heavy with something more, something dangerously close to ‘hope' and though Will’s heart twisted with want so deeply running that the half of all the forts that he had so painstakingly build up, corroded away like it were mere plastic blocks, but there was a fissure of exhaustion and anger that wasn’t really direct at anyone or anything in particular, but the peculiar line of their conversation had made the good doctor a fine object for it.

“What is the purpose of this conversation?”

“After all these years of staying together, coming to know one another, respecting and caring for each other, you still insist on keeping up the wall that separates us into two islands.”

Will stared, his food forgotten. Something sour began to turn within him and a wicked voice inside his head urged him to hurt the man who so carelessly grasped his heart. Who held it safe and made it bleed.

“Is this about me walking out on you in Jack’s office?”

“Don’t do us the disservice to pretend you don’t know what this is about Will.”

“Stop calling me that!”

Dr Lecter looked at him in a way a collector would look at his most finest possession in his collection. He felt being scrutinised by those dark eyes, disassembled and displayed, every secret that he meticulously worked hard to tuck away, every unworded desire that he relentlessly stomped down was being indifferently being examined. Dr Lecter was literally prying his thoughts and dissecting them without ever having to ask any questions or making Will do any test. Because he was conjoined to Will. If he wanted, he could feel everything Will felt, everything he’d ever want to feel. He had verbally scarred every psychiatrist, every counsellor, every single person who wanted to solve the puzzle that Will was and here he was, his soulmate, his other half, who so easily violated his sanctity of mind because he could do it.

Will stood up. The bowl on the table was precariously close to tipping over but Will *did not*

care!

“You can eat the rest of the dinner by yourself, *Hannibal*.”

Because if Dr Lecter could turn Will inside out without batting an eye, Will could *unmake* the man without even listening into this thoughts because when it came to Will, the good doctor was laughably easy to read.

Will grabbed the keys from the counter and stormed out of the house, leaving Dr Lecter with his six course meals that he was sure the man would not let go to waste.

Chapter End Notes

....so, yikes!!
That conversation between Hanni and Will wasn't supposed to go that way but they threatened me with bodily harm so I had to just let them what they wanted to do.

AND... Matthew!!!! He was one of my favourite side characters other than Gideon and Georgia. I'm so glad he's finally here. I have plans for him in this story I'm so excited to share them with you!
cue evil laughter

Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

Will finds a friend. He's mostly tired. And then he's not. But then he's gonna be because i just want to see him in pain. Im sorry.

Chapter Notes

Sooo I'll be updating this story once every month. Preferably within the first two weeks, but we'll see how much real life and muse allow me to do. I'm helpless before them.🤷♀

And this chapter just got out of hand. I wanted it to go a certain way and it ended up in certain way and I was like, ok I'm just here for the ride lol.

So I'm curious if you can spot the themes, or the other elements that i want to touch upon this story. This chapter is largely sort of a set up, with lot of things happening in the background. I wanted to get into the nitty gritty part of the case but that'll happen in the next chapter, because Will and Hanni decided to have A TALK!!!!! Also...check out Saint Agatha. She's like had a really shitty life-story.(no disrespect intended)

But yeah, i hope you like this chapter. It was a lot of fun to write!

He didn’t know for how long he was driving.

He had a vague memory of the way he could get to Wolf Trap quickly, but chose to take the more winded path, one which opened up to the highway that was usually a remote place at night. His father had been paranoid for the right reasons and chose to buy a plot that was faraway from the mainstream civilisation as possible. It was a twenty minutes drive to the nearest market, if he remembered correctly. As Will drove his mind drifted back to the olden days. He couldn’t remember much of it; even now as he tried to recall what the first day of moving out here had been like, he was only left with blurry impressions of subdued

excitement, familiar exhaustion and a few crumbs of conversations that might or might not have happened. He recalled feeling free in the sprawling estate of woods and nothingness. He hadn't ever lived in a place so spacious before, where he could run with the wind biting at his heels, carefree and open. His father had said that he wanted to keep the savings aside for when Will would need it for his studies, but then thought better of it. If Will had stayed another day in that godforsaken town he might not have made it out alive, and his father knew that.

Will felt faintly guilty. It wasn't as if his dad bemoaned the fact he dried up every savings to secure this house for them, but he couldn't help but feel if he could've just waited it out, bit down on his tongue till it bled and *manned* up.

Will sighed. He knew these words were poisonous. If he let them grow, they'd hijack his mind and turn it inside out. Out of everything that made up Will Graham, his mind was the only thing that was his alone.

He didn't know why he reacted like that this evening.

Not to say that Dr Lecter was innocent in the argument but Will was usually more restrained in his reactions to the other man. But this time, it was almost as if he wanted Will to rear up from his distant aloofness, to bite back against the unfairness of the thing that he demanded of him. Because that was it, wasn't it. The man wanted Will to be familiar with him. It must sting the older man to see that the pull of their unfinished bond throbbed both ways, but Will was more in control of how that affected him, at least in the way he wore his mask. Because only he knew how torturous it was to be able to live with the other half of you but never touch them. Dr Lecter surely had no qualms regarding that. He was an adult, accomplished and highly sought after. The nights when he assumed that Will was sound asleep, the betrayal of his actions stabbed into Will's ears the more he listened to them. It hurt all the more because he couldn't fault the other man. He was hardly desirable in his bony disposition and dark temperament. And barely more than a child, no less. Even though he had been sixteen when he first experienced that brand of embarrassment during a lunch, his eyes trained helplessly on the way the older man's mouth moved around his food.

Will momentarily squeezed his eyes.

God, those days were terrible. No wonder he only viewed Will as a fumbling child. But if that were so, then he had absolutely no right getting pissed about his unreciprocated feelings for Alana. Because surely Dr Lecter had felt that through the halfmade bond they shared.

But it didn't matter, Will decided. Hannibal could keep up with his uncharacteristic indecisiveness for as long as he pleased. Soulmates weren't imperative. All Will wanted was to live a life on his own terms. As soon as his final semester would get over, he'd move out to Wolf Trap and be done with that chapter of his. At least then he could finally have a room to breathe.
It was then that suddenly something caught his eyes and he rolled the car to a stop at the side. He peeked out of the window to confirm what he saw. Killing the engine, he slowly got out of the car and walked back in the direction he came from.

The dog was dirty, covered in twigs and mud. It had been showering lightly and the dog looked wet. It stopped cautiously when it saw Will approaching with open arms and a reassuring smile.

"Hey, hey there buddy. You lost? Hey," the dog took off before Will could pet it, trailing a leather leash behind it.

Will ran his hand through his hair and tried to think back to the closest pet shop he'd find out here.
Running back to his car he drove back to a fastfood joint buying a couple of everything that he felt the dog might like. And he kept some for himself as well because he was hungry too.

He drove pensively, worried if he might lose that dog. But thankfully he found it again, loping through the fringes of the woods off to the highway. He parked his car a little ahead, open the back of his car and sat there, waiting for the dog to run by.

“Hey, hey buddy. Come here. Do you like bacon? Wanna have some more?”

The dog was rightfully suspicious of Will’s intentions and didn’t approach him even though he stopped to peer at him curiously. Will could see the poor thing’s snout moving and wondered how long the dog had been running. Will moved measuredly and kept a few pieces of bacon on the side. The dog bounded over to gobble the morsel as soon as Will walked away. Warmth pooled inside Will and he patiently encouraged the dog to eat the jerky until he was eating them out of Will’s hand. He patted the rough, clotted pelt and found himself grinning down at his new friend. He ignored the slight sting in his eyes and cooed while the dog, a ‘Winston' according to the tag, ate furtively.

“Wanna come home with me buddy?”

Winston let out a small huff and his dangly tail wagged in quick succession.

“Hop on over, you wouldn’t mind wearing a seatbelt would you.” Winston tilted his head curiously, while his tail wagged up a storm.

“It’s decided then.”

****

Washing what seemed like years worth of multi layered dirt and grit from Winston was much trickier than Will had anticipated.

Winston was a well-behaved dog, worryingly timid if not outright traumatised. Will had been slow and careful in his movements around him. He couldn’t find any pet shops but it was necessary that he cleaned Winston somehow. He used the brand of shampoo Dr Lecter bought for him. It was pricey though natural and mild. He hoped it wouldn’t be harmful for Winston. He was going to shop for everything Winston needed as soon as sunlight broke.

While washing Winston, he had noticed few bald spots and odd wounds that scabbed over all wrong. He was also thin as a rail under the scraggly fur and Will felt a low simmering anger

heavy in his heart. He praised Winston as he towelled him off with a spare shirt he had found inside his car. After he was sure Winston was dry and cleaner than before, he gave him another jerky to gnaw on and went to take a bath himself.

He padded out of the bathroom to find Winston curled on the dusty couch, whose ears perked up as Will made his way around him. He smiled down at him and ran his fingers through his pelt. There was already a chill in the air and Will admitted to himself that he had been quite rash. The place was not in a good shape. The carpet was peeling off from the floor, the walls were patchy and there was a damp spot enormously glaring at him from the ceiling. Though the water line was still there, there was no electricity and the kitchen had honestly scared him to death. The floorboards were caved in in certain places, the counters layered in a thick blanket of dust. There was also something suspicious growing down by the window that Will dared not investigate.
He tried to remember snippets from his past as he walked around the house. There were no pictures, no memorabilia anywhere. It was desolate and empty. Impersonal. They had only been able to stay here for a couple of months before his dad finally decided that Will was not worth all the troubles. He didn't fault him too. It must have been difficult trying to live with someone who was the cause of death for their soulmate.

A shiver ran down his spine as he stood near the end of the staircase. His nose was cold and he felt fatigued. He climbed each step carefully, going through the two rooms which smelled of old stale air and damp. He found a sheet in one of the cupboards collecting dust mites. He shook it away from his face as far as possible, watching a storm of dust disappear into the air. After a few more tries, the sheet was relatively free of dust. He draped that over Winston and hoped it'd be enough. He climbed up on the couch as well, moving his body around the small ball of fur so that Winston's back was cuddled by Will's front.

He wasn't looking forward to sleep. It was something that was becoming more elusive with every day. But feeling the pleasant heat emanating from Winston lulled him in a drowsy stupor, and his mind shut down in a restless unconscious.

He saw too much.

That had always been something he struggled with. There were times when he'd stare at his maths teacher trying to spell out a formula and notice the odd patches of discoloured skin that slithered into his view every time his sleeve would draw back. And Mr. Brooks always wore full sleeves shirt even when Will felt like his skin would melt in the sweltering sun of Louisiana. He watched how the loudest kid in his class always sat alone in group activities. He watched how someone outside a liquor shop would glance down at their phone furtively and then stuff that offending piece of gadget faraway from their sight. He had seen it being done by his dad often times to know what it meant. His mother's disappointed frown but silent words spoke louder in the tense moments of his dad coming home from work reeking like a composting fish let out in the sun.
But his das wasn't a angry drunk. He was worse.
He had pretended to be deaf on those quiet nights when every morsel of his dad's pathetic begging filtered through the too thin walls. His mother was always silent. He never once heard her speak, or perhaps he did, but it didn't matter enough to his young mind. Because it was his dad's ugly helpless sobs that damped through Will's mind which lingered, always assuring his mother that he would do better, ***be better.*** *That she was the only one that mattered and* ***please please please*** *never to leave him.*
He didn't remember a lot from his childhood but he remembered the strange looks the other kids would give him. He was a shy boy, even by the standard of little children, thin and pale. His mother liked his hair long, said it went perfectly with his cherubic face, ***like Saint Agatha, Willy. You remind me of her, you know****. And he had believed it to be true because his mother rarely spoke to him, and the only times she did, it was to comb through his luscious locks of hair.*

He hated them.

And so they watched : this queer little guy, too quiet, too knowing, too seeing. He had once informed his classmate that her parents were going to divorce when he saw her bring an expensive locket with black strands tangled into its lock. Her parents were ginger through and through. She had boasted that her father had bought it for her mother and her mother was so happy that she was going to take her to buy a gift for her father. At her grandmother's place.

It was the first time he had been hit.

Children have a remarkable bursts of strength and a vicious sort of cruelty in them. They are so unrestrained by their inhibitions...**so raw. So pure. They need to be saved...to be coveted.**

Will remembered coming across a carcass. He imagined it was a racoon. He couldn't be sure. Its skin was already one with the road and there were no soft parts left, except for the stray strands of flesh that hung limply from its mangled bones.

His dad always joked how he found dead things.

When he was struck with a blinding, all consuming fire of pain that left him paralysed and convulsing on the school trip, in front of the horror of other students and flabbergasted teachers, he experienced his first ever death, and realized with a startling clarity : that he had never been so alive *before. He had cackled then, tasting blood, and riding on the pain of his bones still being crunched to dust. He had cackled thinking how he missed this feeling. How he had always longed for something, to feel anything other than mundane, to feel like a* human.

He had died and came back to life, with a heavy heart and a name written elegantly across the skin of his left wrist in a language that was foreign.

He took to wearing gloves. His mother didn't protest because she rarely paid attention, too busy drowning in an acute melancholy that could only be suppressed the more she lost herself in menial works.

His dad noticed but never said a thing because...well, he never said, and as much as Will could see, he never wanted to violate the privacy of the only person who treated him as a real human being. But he knew...just as he knew that his mother despised *him, that his dad was riddled with shame. For what, he didn't want to know.*

But children... they are so vulnerable. So very...malleable. they should always be protected...always looked after. Even a small moment of carelessness, when you think they'd be alright at night to bring a medicine that you forgot to buy, even when you think that they'll be alright staying over at their friend's home full of strangers because you felt like you were entitled to a little free time of your own, even when you feel like no one would come looking for them when they are **locked inside a door with you, as their ---**

A wet thud.

A pattering of hooves on a floor made with bones.

Antlers, primeval and wild, winding up up up into a pitchless eye all seeing, and red.

‘ **Will** *’ the monster calls, the moon breaks over and a girl with a slit throat beckons with open arms, and a laugh full of blood.*

‘You are the one who killed my Dad, should I say thanks?’

‘ **Will** *’*

Georgia screams but her lips are sown shut and she scratches, fingers at the wires that hold her down, keep her quiet and Will

Will laughs.

He gasped, his eyes darting frantically around the unknown place, light filtering through the thick curtains. He retched, only missing the inquisitive dog that had sprinted from before him, instead nosing at Will’s damp neck. Bile coloured his taste and he retched once more because of that. His face was wet with sweat and what smelled like Winston’s tender loving care. He had sweated through his shirt, that clung to his frame uncomfortably. He patted Winston, ruffling his hair and managing to give a tired smile for his sake.

He peeled off his shirt, draped it over the armrest of the sofa and took a cold bath. By the time he felt he was ready for the world, it was almost a quarter to ten. He put on his shirt that smelled slightly sour and was not completely dry. He looked down at Winston who was digging earnestly at the moulded carpet. He pensively opened his phone to see an innocuous

two missed calls for Dr Lecter, seven texts from Beverley and five missed calls from Jack. He went through the texts and they were all Beverley asking why he had missed the first three classes and if he was alright or she needed to come with an ambulance.

Chuckling, he shot a quick text telling her he was alright and no paramedics were required but he had adopted a dog so he needed to buy stuffs for him. Beverley responded almost instantaneously, ordering Will to wait for her at Dancy's and then they'd go for shopping for the dog together.

>> His name's Winston. He's a old soul

He snapped a picture of Winston chewing leisurely at the foot of the sofa and sent it to Beverley.
He was bombarded with a slew of emojis that were too yellow for his eyes.

And then he called Jack, because he might as well get it done sooner than later.

"Where the hell have you been Will?"

Ah.

"I'm at my old place. Did you need anything?"

"Did I – do you even remember what you were supposed to do? Did you even talk with Zeller?"

"I did. I emailed him. He said he'd get in contact with me after he was done with a work he was doing."

"You call him right now and *tell* him *I* told you that those files are needed to be brought to you *right now*. Yes?"

Will bit back a sigh. " Yeah Jack."

"Good. You get me as soon as something clicks. I have hysterical parents at my back trying to know if we are any close to catching the monster. And we have to catch this monster, Will. So you have to put your shit together."

“I got it Jack.” Will disconnected the call and plopped down on the sofa. He typed a note to Zeller asking him to meet Will at Dancy's and then after five more minutes of play wresting with Winston on the dusty carpet, they set out.

Darcy's was a relatively quaint place, a little niche but affordable, especially with the horror of students loan hanging on to his shoulder, and he was selfishly happy that this place remained under the radar of everyone else.

He walked in to the store, giving a smile to the owner of the diner who was wiping down the counter and took his usual seat by the large window at the back. Barry leaned on the counter and hollered, “The usual for you Mr. Graham?”

“Just Will, Barry. And yes, but please add another scone. With some chocolate dip.”

“Will. Treating yourself after all, huh.”

“Yeah. Just felt this day would need that extra bit."

Barry sagely shook his head, taking the confectionery out of the case and placing it on a plate.

“You work too much Will. You stare so intently and for so long at that thing, you’re glasses need a glasses of their own.”

Will laughed, scratching at his head self consciously.
He took out his laptop, feeling a little flustered, but he had to do some work and he always wrote better here than anywhere else.

Barry served him his breakfast and he shot a quick thanks. He could see his car parked off to a side. He had found a pet clinic on his way here and had done the preliminary check ups. He had also bought some treats and dog food, some of which he had given to Winston to eat in the back of his car.

Beverley had said she’d get out of the class in the next fifteen minutes so she’d be on her way.

Will worked and munched on his sweet delights. His paper was coming along nicely and he was really looking forward to submitting it. He typed until a crick formed at the back of his neck and he arched, cracked his joints and glanced down at his wrist ro see that it was almost one in the afternoon. Zeller was supposed to drop by here by eleven- thirty. He continued with his work until he felt his hands would come off. Beverley had sent her annoyed face stuck inside her car at a traffic. He kept his laptop inside the bag and thought he'd take Winston for a walk when Zeller stepped through the door, carrying a black duffel with him.

When he spotted Will, his otherwise bland face sagged in a fidgety frown, and walked determinedly towards him.

Will kept quiet about the tardiness on Zeller's part but only gave him a long look, one which the other man decidedly didn't meet. He slid the duffel towards Will and frowned more prominently at him.

"You could've told me that it was Jack who told you that you had to go through those files."

Will raised a brow. "I assumed it would be apparent given that I am not an actual agent and I definitely didn't have any clearance."

Zeller looked flustered and he stumbled over his words. "I don't have the time to parse out the apparent meanings of things you should be clear about from the get-go. Anyways, Jack wants you to return these files by the end of this week. And I hope I don't have to tell you that you need to keep these very safe and whatever *mojo* you do should be done under wraps."

Will raised both of his brows.

"My '*mojo*'?"

"Yeah. The thing you do with the crime scene photographs, guessing and theorizing. I don't understand why Jack gives you credit. Your people-watching habits makes you a good theorizer but there will come a time when you can't talk your way out of the mess and then Jack will see reason."

Will swallowed a sip of water, Barry coming around them and asking if they wanted anything. Zeller shook his head, glaring out of the window.

Will smiled up at Barry, taking out the money and keeping it on the table, with a generous tip.

“It’s funny how you can experience the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon. Theoretically you know that it’s just brain trying to connect dots and interpreting new information into neat patterns, but when that happens in reality it’s quite--"

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Will stared unblinkingly at Zeller who looked discomfited by him.

“’People-watching' is a phrase that Lounds likes to use as a throwaway term. And given that what ‘mojo' I have or not, is something which falls under the rumour category...the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon just becomes more *interesting*.”

Zeller didn’t react, his annoyed frown fixated on to his face. Will was mildly impressed.

“Whatever Graham.”

And then he was gone in a flurry of footsteps and slew of low mutterings.

Beverley arrived soon after, apologising profusely and shrieking at Winston for his utter cuteness, the energy of which got transferred to him and he started bounding in the parking lot while Will prayed that he didn’t regret buying a leash, first and foremost. They talked about a couple of things while they shopped for Winston. She was quiet when Will suggested that they drop by Dr Lecter’s house to grab a couple of essentials for Will, and didn’t ask anything as to why he was not-really moving into his house in Virginia – for which he was grateful. Will had strategically chosen a time when he knew Dr Lecter wouldn’t be there and so he was utterly caught off guard when the other man was chopping celery in the kitchen while Bach played in the background.

Beverley covered for a startled Will pleasantly going on about what Will couldn’t quite hear. His ears rang with the slow and steady simmering of anger mixed with embarrassment at being caught so easily. Of course he knew.

“Well, now that we have you here, surely you must be joining us for the meal that is almost done.”

Beverley surreptitiously stole glances between a mute and glaring Will who bore holes into the floors and Dr Lecter who was pleasantly looking at her with a welcoming smile.

She chose the wise option and declined. “I’m really sorry for not being able to stay long enough for your expertly made meals Dr Lecter but I just came here with Will on an errand and now that it’s, uh, complete I’ll just see myself out. I promise next time I’ll come with time and a cavernous appetite.”

“Ah. How unfortunate. See that you really do next time, Miss Katz. Will and I would surely enjoy your company.”

“Deal! Bye Will.” She half – ran, half-walked out of the house leaving Will and Dr Lecter alone.

Will stared intently at the expensive carpet beneath hie feet. He was sure it had some fancy name that would make him roll his eyes so hard that they might get lost in his shabby mind palace. He wanted desperately to bring Winston in, to see him shed all over the precious furniture that the older man had and to watch in dark pleasure as he’d bite into the softest and fluffiest cushions on his *ottoman*. Oh he was positively pleased to think the abject horror the sight of a soiled carpet would bring to dearest Hannibal. Yes, he would like that wouldn’t he. That would serve him right.

“If you’re quite done with Imagining certain doom on my carpet, we could perhaps enjoy a meal together.”
Will snorted, taking his eyes off the damn carpet and fixing it somewhere beyond the older man's shoulder.

“What’s the carpet called?”

The question threw Dr Lecter off kilter so much so that his confusion tinged through the half-made bond.

“Are you--"

“You don’t get to ask me that.”

Will knew that provoking the man wasn’t a good idea. He had never really seen Dr Lecter rattled or genuinely pissed off but he reckoned that it must be a sight to behold.

“Then what do I get to ask you, Will.”

Will suddenly had enough of everything. So much was happening with so little time to process and his own mood swings were giving him a headache. Not to mention the irritability and fatigue he was feeling due to not sleeping properly in weeks and the strange oddities he was experiencing ever since his trip to hospital, he just felt so donw with everything.

And Winston was journeying the whole day in his car, he needed a proper rest and a warm meal.

“I just came here to grab a couple of my things Dr Lecter. I really don’t want to have an argument right now.”

He made to move towards the stair at the back but in a synchrony of fluid motions too quick for Will to understand, Dr Lecter was there, blocking his way physically but not touching Will. His body was a long line of relaxed ambiguity that sent all the warning signs within Will to go blaring off all at once. Will unconsciously straightened his back, something which the other man mirrored effortlessly by going even more relaxed, his arms casually hanging by his sides. Will was forced to meet his eyes then, because the challenge was Dr Lecter presented him with was *vulgar* in a way that Will never thought he was capable of, given his sophisticated sensibilities.

But push a man too far , and he may leave his manners at the door.

Dr Lecter’s sanguine brown eyes were half-lidded, his mouth pursed in a thin line of tension, the only thing that gave the other man away.

He was as excited as Will was.

Will licked his lips out of force of habit, curiously tracking the way how Dr Lecter's eyes followed the movement earnestly.

"You're the worst at sending signals, Dr Lecter. I don't understand you." Will said into the growing heat that bloomed between them. Will felt pinned by the intensity of his eyes, unable to move, to run. Will wondered if the other man was as affected by Will's proximity as he was to Dr Lecter's. He wondered if he did run now, would Hannibal give him a chase?

"Don't you."

Will shook his head, more grimacing than smiling, "You want me to call you by your name, want me to seek you out when I'm lost to myself. You want me to rely on you fundamentally and you encourage this reliance, what some might call co-dependency. You honed my constitution to be fully developed than most other ordinary constitutions out there, always guiding me, anchoring me. Lending me your voice so that I could navigate through the clouds of death that follow after me. You want me to make you my shelter in the nights of storms, Dr Lecter...when you treat me as if I'm a child you grew up watching, looked after and feel responsible for. You treat me as if I am your ward and not your soulmate."

Dr Lecter watched him now with an unfathomable and inexplicable emotion that Will was too unsure to tread on. He felt like he could go on. He could craft an entire tome dedicated to the nuances of Dr Hannibal Lecter from all the things that he had seen and come to learn. He might not be able to dissect the man as he was wont to do others, Will included, he could very well flay the secrets to the surface, make them shine with the glaze of blood and knowledge as they seek solidarity.

'*You are alone because you are unique.'* He had told Will when he was young and still suspecting of him.

'*Then you're as alone as I am!'* Will had spat hatefully, not realizing then the truth of his words.

Perhaps their half- made bond amounted to something, perhaps there was still something left to salvage because Dr Lecter's eyes flashed with a emotion that Will knew was reflected in

his own. How he knew what Will was thinking was not important. But the thin sheen of moisture that collected unashamedly in Dr Lecter's eyes made Will speak out.

"We're both alone without each other."

He closed his eyes, all the words that could've been said, all the words that must've been said --- all suspended in that one moment of fragile silence.

Their relationship could be measured in silence, Will wondered incredulously as warm, too hot, hands of Dr Lecter cane around his face, cradling them with such tenderness that made Will's knee go soft.
There was no distance left between them. Will's front was pressed to the other man's solid chest. Will was being drowned by the magnitude of what Hannibal was feeling. Their bond pulsed like a deprived , starving soul finally seeing the light after centuries in darkness, impatient and reverent. *Hopeful*.

"Tell me what you want Will. Tell me what you need."

Will's breath got stuck somewhere inside his lungs. He flailed with his arms as they uselessly hung beside him, finally clutching the steady forearms of Hannibal as he still held him as if he might never let him go.

"I want you to see me as I am. Treat me as I deserve to be. Can you do that?"

"*Will*," Hannibal's soft exhalation sounded more like benediction.

"Can you do that Hannibal?"

Amusement glimmered appreciatively in his eyes and he brought their foreheads together, the touch of his skin on his own so profoundly more intimate than anything could ever be. Will was also thrown away by the fact that there was not a great difference in height between them, though Hannibal always felt the one towering over him.

"You cunning little boy. Do you understand what you're asking of me Will?"

“Yes,” Will answered a little impatient, a little turned on. “I want you to see me as I am now.”

“Oh, I see you Will Graham. I see you and no one shall ever see you in the way I do. And yet you always manage to surprise me with your unpredictability, dear Will. I could only hope, and desire. I could never entirely predict you.”

“You’re one to talk.” Will scoffed. Hannibal offered him a smile that chased every bad thought away from his mind, leaving him feeling light and relaxed. Hannibal leaned in, kissing his forehead, and Will managed not to barf his heart out that seriously didn’t want to stay encaged within him.

“Now if you will join me at the table, Will. I find that I make a rather poor company to myself when you are not around.”

Will grinned as he walked behind Hannibal into the kitchen. “Is that you admitting to .missing me?”

“I will neither confirm, nor deny. However, I am curious about our new...guest you evidently have befriended.”

Ah...

“Yeah. I kinda...found him. And adopted him. His name is Winston. He’s two years old and really well behaved.”

Hannibal nodded attentively while busying himself in his work, doing several things at once, uninterrupted.

“I’ll see to it that a well-suited shelter be made for him in the backyard for Winston by tomorrow. For now, he can stay at the guest room downstairs. And only in there, of course.”

“Of course!” Will repeated solemnly, cringing at himself for thinking about the stuff with Hannibal’s carpet and Winston so childishly.

“Thank you, Hannibal. For Winston.”

Hannibal spared a indulging glance at him. “Always, Will. You need only ask.”

While Will waited for Hannibal to be done with the food and in between taking Will for a long walk down the neighbouring road, Will’s mind was filled with the thoughts of the new case and the children. He had to talk to Alana about the meeting at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane and also find out about Georgia’s suicide, the thought of which still made a sort of crawling sensation being spread through out his body. There was much he needed to do and soon. He had to be on his utmost efficiency. He didn’t want any more children coming to harm before they found out who thr killer was. As he led Winston in through the back door that led into a small passage which opened up to the guest room, Will imagined what their new dynamic would be like. He was eagerly waiting for Hannibal to see him not as a boy but a man. As someone his equal.

“Bon appetite Will.”

Will smiled as he bit into the carefully laid out morsel.

_____

Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

Too many stuffs happens. Someone's about to get their shits handed out to them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The pendulum swung heavily in the darkness of his mind.

The single room of his mind palace dimly illuminated caught the dust that was floating off from the shelves. He saw a door appear right beside a shelf, perfectly normal. He walked through the door and into a happy backyard with well cared for trees, and flower beds adorning the place. The golden pendulum swung gravely and in one frame there was the giant ancient tree brightening the entire garden into a more lively one, and in the next, there was the body of a child with all his blood spilled on the ground staring hollowly at Will.

Will stepped towards the body, eyeing the scars around the gory sockets, the child's throat cut from ear to ear in a dastardly smile that was both revolting and shocking at the same time. Will could see the silver of his bone if he eyed the maw too closely.

I slit his throat open; vulnerable. Just how you left him. This is your doing. See what your callousness has done.

With the swipe of the pendulum the body was now cleaned, every evidence of blood clinically washed away. It now had the disinfectant purity in its absolute whiteness that stripped meticulously every hint of feature, indication, or mobility that made this stagnant body ‘Nathaniel'. Will watched the concave of his tiny stomach, the indentation of the stitches the mortician placed after examining the long controlled cuts diagonally on his abdomen, and the laceration along his chest drew his attention particularly. The body was bare in its immaturity, on the brink of morphing into a whole person, cut abruptly short. The imaginary trail drawn from the body's under chin down to the navel that was carefully untouched, stopping, just before the raise of the hip bones, delicately and fragile, was...

Tantalising.

I make these cuts, knowingly, and in control of my burning rage because this is what I am brought down to. I have to let them know that this is as much their fault as it is mine. I cut them here because after baring them so viscerally, you'd think there's nothing more that can be done to them. You'd think, after killing them, there's nothing more heinous that can happen to them --

Will looked carefully at the frozen picture of Jeremy, secured to the chains of the swing, wilfully binding him to his childhood...protecting their innocence. He looked at Nathaniel as he was sitting under a tree that he no doubt played with several times, looking at the corner where his parents probably had barbecue on Sundays.

The pendulum diligently swung.

Preserving the happy memories.

Just as I saw them, just as I want to remember them.
But they have to change because that's the only way they'll understand. That's the only way they'll learn. This is my statement.
This is my design.

Will blinked.

He rubbed at the bridge of his nose, trying to ignore the sharp throb at the sides of his skull. It almost felt like his brain had grown too big for its bony cage, and at any moment, it'd come leaking out his ears and nose. He was fortunate enough to catch a good three hours of sleep in the last forty-nine hours. He had gone through the files over and over again, poured his mind into the pictures of these children until every little detail was seared into his brain. Jack had also sent the interview logs with all the witnesses from both cases, and reports taken from the parents and families. The forensic came up dry every time Jack dropped by, the killer not leaving behind any traces, and it only added to the pressure Will felt burgeoning in his mind. He had noticed that Jack had personally gone to interview the kid's parents with whom Nathaniel was staying over that night.

Will called Jack, in a daze, not really paying attention to the time.

Jack picked it up soon enough, but his gruff voice that was gruffer than usual gave him a start and he peered at the time on his phone. It was three in the morning.

“Will.”

“Uh, Jack. I’m sorry I called you up at this hour, I wasn’t really paying attention. I can call you back a few hours later.”

“No, it’s alright. Do you have a profile?”

“Yes. I think we are dealing with an extremely disturbed person, not just mentally, but also emotionally. He is – has gone through a massive trauma that he is still processing. I’d bet anything that it’s a childhood trauma. Probably sexual assault or abuse. He...he considers what he’s doing as *righteous* and *educational*. These acts of violence is acted up on a fit of frenzied aggression but as soon as the victim dies, he channels his aggression into a means to his end, which is to taught the parents a lesson. He kills and leaves the children in the moment that stood out to him the most, something which meant the lost childhood that he didn’t get to live and so he preserves those moments. He might have internalized the trauma and feels a certain...*pull* towards the aesthetic of his victims when they are dead, the cuts he made are to violate that aesthetic ...punishing not only the parents who have somehow been negligent i his eyes, but also himself for wanting the things he is trying to save these children from.

“He – he’d be an ordinary man, if not too shy or reserved. He’d have a very flexible working time and must have a child of his own...probably fitting the profile of the victims. He’s acting out not only because pf the trauma he suffered but because he’s terrified of the same thing happening to his own child."

Will was looking out from the window, not particularly at anything. With every blink he could see Nathaniel staring at him, missing his eyes.

“He doesn’t want to see himself in their eyes. There’s something different about Nathaniel. I can’t put my finger on what.”

“Goddamn these psychopathic dads. Although we might actually have a lead. The playground in which we had found Jeremy, was not very far from an almost abandoned toolshed of a neighbour who didn’t really use it a lot. We found blood, tarp and a partial footprint.”

“That indicates it was premeditated to a certain degree.”

“Yes. So the killer might have known or at least stalked his victims. The Reeds and Stones

had shifted to the state, a few months ago and in the previous school, there was a complaint lodged against the maths teacher behaving inappropriately with few of the children. Ted, the Stones boy, was one of them. And so was Nathaniel."

"Where is that teacher now?"

"We are still on that. The bastard seems to have erased his complete social life and all those who knew him swear that he had just dropped from the face of the earth."

Will nodded, then realized that he was on the phone so he articulated his response.

"And on the side note, Will. Are you holding up okay?"

Will blinked.

"Yeah, why won't I be?"

"Well you sure as hell don't sound like you're well. And your face was weathered enough that Zeller commented on it."

"Zeller talks about me to you?"

"No." Was all Jack said. Will sighed, pinching the side his nose.

"I'm- I'm fine. Just...under the weather."

"Hmm." Jack said that conveyed just how much he believed Will, "You get some sleep. And leave the files by my office tomorrow."

"Okay."

He walked out of his room, his joints cold and stiff. It had been raining for the entire evening, the steady dirge would have otherwise put him to a deep sleep but. Well, the longer he could stay awake the better.
Hannibal wasn't home. He was called away to give a lecture at Stanford and the only good thing about it was the chaste kiss on the forehead and a two-minute long embrace that had

done wonders to settle the frizzy edges of Will's mind. He was restless, irate and peculiarly needy. He wanted to chalk it all up to his sleep deprivation but he knew that it wasn't the only cause. The bond between them pulsed even now. He stopped in his tracks and stared down longingly at the mark on his wrist, bringing a finger reverently and tracing it with a want so potent that Will's knees felt soft. He wanted the older man here, with him. He wanted to sleep next to the solidness of his presence, safe and the only time he'd ever feel relaxed.

He yawned for the hundredth time and walked over to where Winston was sleeping in the guest room. Even though Hannibal had made a lovely, and expensive, home for him outside but he spent more times indoor and Hannibal had given up chiding Winston for it when he became more excited to accompany him rather than Will on certain occasions.

Winston perked up and bounded over to him. He hugged and patted his beloved friend, climbing over the bed and Winston too following his suit.
Will felt tired to the bones but he knew he couldn't sleep. He held Winston and waited for the next morning.

****

Garrett Jacob Hobbs lounges in the solitary chair watching Will as he gouges the eyes of Nathaniel Reeds with a hunting knife, grunting and panting.

"You do everything you can to give them the best that life can give you. Work tirelessly to see a smile brighten their little faces, suffer through hardships just to hear they call you by that name." He speaks but his mouth doesn't move. His face is bashed in, one side completely unrecognisable. He is bleeding sluggishly from his wounds, and Will feels a certain pride in the fact that he had beaten the shit out of him. ***Had beaten the life out of him.***

"You do everything in your power to keep them safe, to keep them happy. But they all fly away, one moment here and the next – gone*."*

"You deranged fucks!" Will spits as he pulls out the eyes and holds them in his hands.

There is a wet huff behind him, the sound of hooves. Garrett Jacob Hobbs disappears and in his place is the visage of a man...only something much, much more than that. It is made of darkness, the kind that traps light, suffocates it and doesn't let it go. The man has horns that

twisted and winded intricately into the nothingness above. It crouches, and watches. Listens. Will has forgotten to breathe. His heart falls out of his chest and Will stares at it despaired.

The man who is not, darts closer, grabbing the muscled organ and burrows its fanged teeth into the supple meat.

Will feels the ache of his empty chest.

He looks down at the eyes and sees his father's face looking back at him.

Will shuddered so hard he feared he couldn't stop. His jaw was locked and he could taste stale blood inside his mouth. He got up from where he had fallen over, feeling cold to his bone, confused and scared.

Where was he?

What happened?

He looked down and saw that he was only in his boxers. And he was standing on the middle of a road who knew where. It was dark and the area around him didn't look familiar.

He couldn't remember. He couldn't remember where he was or what he was doing. He had nothing on him, no phone, no watch, no *Winston*. Hadn't he been playing with him in the backyard? What...

Sirens and glaring lights flashed in front of him and Will ducked his head into his arms.

A police car came to a stop before him, and he stood there, shivering and scared.

An officer stepped out, unsure and wary, one of his hand pressed to his side and the other open and soothing.

“Sir, are you alright? What are you doing here in your present state?”

Will couldn’t open his mouth. He was shuddering too badly. The man realized that and somewhat sheepishly took off his own jacket. He cautiously offered it to Will and he gratefully took it, wearing it and sighing, almost crying at the warmth that seeped into his cold-bitten bones.

“Sir is there any ID on you? Or someone you can call?”

“J-Jack C-Craw- Jack Crawford. Call h-him. Head. BSU.” Will managed to speak before the officer concluded that he was on something.

The officer eyed him suspiciously and called in the department. Will prayed that he was carried away to the station before his feet turned blue.

He must have fainted because the next time he opened his eyes he was in a hospital, sans any wounds but feeling no better than the times he had those.

Even more unpleasant was Jack Crawford’s grave face staring down at him with, heaven forbid, concern. Now that, certainly made Will more nervous than it should.

“Glad to see you awake,” he began gruffly. “Anything you need?”

Will shook his head trying to sit up. Jack came forward and helped him lean against the wall.

“So. Were you going to tell me that you were sleep deprived?”

“I...was just going to wait it out.” He spoke around the thorny wool in his mouth, fiddling with the IV that ran into his hand.

Jack gave him an unimpressed glare.

“You were sleepwalking at the butt crack hour of dawn , half naked in the freezing cold. If it weren’t for a concerned citizen reporting about a suspiciously naked man, you’d have died of an accident if hypothermia didn’t get you first. Does Hannibal know?”

“I don’t want to go to him with every little problem I have.” Jack couldn’t know about the giant hole in his memories. He was missing a good chunk of hours between him leaving school and then arriving at home. Before, he’d just have trouble recollecting ten to twenty minutes of his sleepwalking bouts. But he had never lost time like this. Whatever it was, it was certainly accelerating.

“Getting yourself killed while asleep is not a little problem. Look, Will. I know that ever since Hobbs, you’ve been struggling with coming to terms with it. And it’s normal. We all go through that shit. But you have more important things ahead of you and if you can’t come to terms with it on your own, then it’s not weak if you seek help.”

“Are you saying I should see a shrink?” Will said abrasively.

“I’m saying talk to Hannibal. Or someone who’s not Hannibal. I don’t get paid to be a babysitter. Or a couples counsellor.”

Will swallowed dryly. He looked away from Jack, his hand kneading the blanket.

“I didn’t mean to cause you any trouble.”

Jack sighed loudly.

He came up beside Will and sat down rigidly. After a tense moment, Jack sighed again and grabbed Will’s shoulder in what must have been a sign of solidarity.
“Look, Will. It was no trouble. You’re a good kid. And what you do is at the cost of your mental wellbeing. I know that. But I also knew your old man and when I see you, I see his hard-ass stubbornness in you, which never did him any good, nor will it do you much good. If it’s not Hannibal, I can ask Alana to --"

“NO. I mean, no. It’s alright. I’ll speak with Hannibal when he comes back.”

“Well anyways. The doctor was pretty adamant on a check- up and in order for you to walk out of here without your guardian or soulmate, you need to sit through one session with a counsellor they’d refer. Okay?”

Will sighed. “Okay.”

Jack eyed him for a moment, pursing his lips and hummed. Then giving a brisk nod, he left.

Sometimes Will found it hard to believe that the surly, no-nonsense man was once young and friends with his dad, who had been generally a comical man, with a weird sense of humour and a tendency to joke at inopportune moments. At least, that was what he told him. When they had shifted to Wolf Trap, Jack was the first person he’d called. They had caught up with one another, even dined at Jack’s place. Will still remembered how well put together Mrs Crawford was. She was soft-spoken but assertive, humorous enough to actually laugh out at dad’s sorry jokes while Jack only rolled his eyes, and knowing enough to treat Will as an adult rather than a hormonal fourteen year old. She actually listened to the answers she enquired about and was an overall wonderful person.

But then his dad went missing, and Will didn’t know what to do. Sure he had found out recently that the psychiatrist that his dad had practically begged to see him turned out to be his soulmate, but he was functionally alone, trying to come to terms with the fact that his dad never returned from work.
Jack had been the only one to believe that his dad hadn’t deserted him. With all the evidence pointing otherwise, Will still believed that his dad wouldn’t leave him alone. Months of search didn’t yield anything. Soon months turned into years, and Will never heard from him again.

But now that he thought about it, his constitution had manifested before he met Hannibal after he came to Wolf Trap. It almost showed up two years ago their final move. But try as he may, Will couldn’t remember their meeting. In order for a constitution to manifest, eye or skin contact or preferably both, was needed. After the first contact, the first signs of the constitution would start showing up, after the body had time to assimilate the changes taking place.
Now Will’s research was about soulbonds and how constitutions were often an important factor in the psychological make-up of a person, not just something philosophical or romantic. And he had come across few cases where constitutions manifested impartially through the soulbond but only because of spatial or even mental proximity, but puttering out and becoming somewhat tumorous, eating away at their confidence and more often than not, being thrown into asylums for being delirious.
But Will knew...he knew that he had seen Hannibal. And remembering why he couldn’t remember it was important.

****

Hannibal came home to Will singing in his apron, stirring something that smelled exceptionally good, lost to his own world.

The sight had been so rare, so unexpected in its welcome happenstance that Hannibal experienced something akin to a barrage or emotions let loose as the dams were lowered. He stopped in his track, withholding the call of the name that had become unanimous with his own in his mind, and took the opportunity to observe unabashed. Not that he ever did anything that required him to feel bashful, but he usually granted his soulmate the privilege of privacy that he found a great plaything in the cases of others, and so he watched, now, as Will slightly swayed in the melody of a song he only spoke occasionally, humming most of it, and stirring the pot passionately.

Admittedly, Hannibal wasn't very satisfied with the results of his preliminary set-up.

He had been careful in handling Will's capacity to withstand long periods of extreme and passive agitated condition of his mind. He was cultivating something he had only a tantalising glimpse when he first got Will under his care. He longed to see that same dive of righteous rage that swirled like a whirlwind of retribution in his eyes, his young hands around his own throat, the only one to come so close and still live, squeezing the air out of his lungs – *oh!* It had been a sight that kept him awake for nights on end, only lost to his mind creating vivid recreations of those short handful of moments when he had seen, truly seen, the might of Will Graham.

So when Jack called him in a rare case of panic, almost fumbling after him how a local police had found Will almost 3 miles away from his home, barefoot and functionally unconscious.

He wanted to be there when Will would first fall prey to his weaknesses. He wanted to see Will facing his shortcomings, his faults and then wait, patiently and forever with him, to realize the true potential of his being.

Hannibal had already walked up behind him, his eyes going over the effortlessly sensual line of his back.
Will whirled around and crashed into Hannibal's chest, almost jumping out of his skin, stayed by Hannibal's arms holding his shoulder.

"Hannibal!"

Will's ears were put aflame, his curls loosening by the surprise, his big blue eyes shining with

joy and relief.

“God! You scared me. I ought to put a bell around you.” He joked, and Hannibal smiled. He stepped away to allow Will mobility in his endeavour, curiously peaking at the dish dear Will was preparing.

“No. This is my time now. You can go and fresh up. Food is ready and it’s no six course meal but you’ll love it.” Will informed him as he pushed him away from where he was mixing the meatballs with the spaghetti.

“I have no doubt about that, dear Will. But tell me, are you doing alright? Jack was quite worried when he called me.”

Will looked away, turning his back and busying himself at the stove.

“Yeah. Turned out not sleeping for weeks on row can make me sleepwalk. Surprise. But the doctors made me consult with a counsellor so that’s great.”

“A counsellor?”

“Yeah. Her name’s Molly Harper. She’s actually quite decent.” Will shrugged.

Hannibal had of course heard of her. If he remembered correctly, she was one of Alana's friend, quite ordinary in her academics but too open and had a generally positive disposition. His colleagues had quite fawned over her. However she was a specialist in cases where soulmates were either unnaturally separated or suffered severe abuse.

Interesting.

“I see. I am glad Will that you are seeing someone other than myself or Alana. It puts my mind at ease to know you’ll be in capable hands."

Will looked over his shoulder, his brow raised.
“You remember her? She told me you were quite dismissive of her when she was at John Hopkins.”
Hannibal, arched a brow.

“You talk about her days in school in your sessions?”

Will huffed, wagging the spatula at him. “Nope. You don’t get to judge my counsellor who’s possibly the only one who sees me other than a test subject.”

“I didn’t . I don’t.”

“That’s only because otherwise I’d break your pen if you ever attempted to box me into that.”

“*My pen*,”

“Enough with you. Go and get fresh.”

“As you demand.” Hannibal deferred. As he passed by his room, he made a note to inquire into a distant acquaintance of his who worked at the hospital where Will was admitted. He would have to see how capable Miss Molly Harper has become. Will, of course, always deserved nothing short of best.

****

He rearranged the books on the ‘Oa- Ps' shelf carefully, listing them according to their surnames first. It was a slow day, there were a couple of people who were interested enough to walk through the gates but not determined to buy anything. They milled about, staring impassively or longingly at the stuff, and then hobbling forward. Sometimes Will liked to watch these people to pass time. He’d try to read what their lives could have been like outside the four walls of the shops. Though it was quite insensitive, but it was better than going over the register a hundred thousand times.

Mr. Brooks was in the shop as well today. He was feeling better than the other days, strong enough to actually come down from his apartment upstairs. He was busy with some rare books, fixing any torn pages or gluing the binding together.

Will finished with his current slot and he moved to the next one when the chime of the door

sounded more prominently. Will looked over his shoulder and saw that it was the same awkward but oddly intense man from before. The one who kinda looked familiar. What was his name? Something Black...

He noticed Will watching him and offered a reserved smile. Will startled and hastily turned around, his back going straight and he cursed himself for that reaction. What was he, a thirteen year old stealing a glimpse at their crush. Will rolled his eyes at his own stupidity and then turned back, gave a determined non-smile smile and walked towards the counter to get the box of the new arrivals.

The man let out a breathe and his dark eyes fixed upon Will's every move, something which Will was keenly aware of.

"So you were right. The book wasn't for me."

Will busily took out the books, and piled them in columns on the desk.

"I don't think I ever said if it was or wasn't."

The man, *Matthew Brown* – he remembered, gave a soft smile.

"But it was implied. And I guess I should be more careful with the kind of books I decide to take home."

Will, not sure of what he should do or shouldn't, didn't do anything at all and only walked away carrying on with his work.

"Uh, there's something I'd like to ask you."

Will saw that Mr. Brooks was nose deep in the book he was repairing and there weren't any customers in the shop, so he let out a breath and turned around.

"What can I help with you sir?"

Mathew winced and scratched his head. "I was, uh, wondering if you'd...I mean, if you'd like to grab lunch together. I know a really good place just down the street."

Will blinked, his cheeks flaring up and stumbling over his words. That just came out of nowhere. And it never happened with Will before. What was one supposed to do when confronted with such a situation. He really wished that Beverley was here with him now. She'd laugh so hard that Will could muster up the courage to respond in coherent string of words only to make her stop.

"Or I could just—I mean, never mind. I just..." Mathew fumbled, appearing as uncomfortable as Will was.

"No. I- it's not you. I'm—really thank you, but I have a soulmate."

Matthew's face went slack, before quickly being wiped off with any reaction, leaving only a furrowed brow and an unsure smile.

"Oh." He said, and chuckled. "I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable."

Will shook his head vigorously. "No, really it's fine. No harm done."

Mathew smiled, and then paused slightly. "May I ask you something personal?"

Will really wanted to go back to his books.
"I'm not sure, sir, if you-"

"Have you met your soulmate?"

Will stared, taken aback. "That really is something which is none of your business. Sir."

Mathew nodded agreeably and then apologised hurriedly before leaving just as abruptly. Will felt odd and slightly bad for being so hard on the man, but his natural disposition to uncomfortable situations was either sass or brutal and in certain cases, both.
Will sighed and instead focused on finishing the task at hand as soon as he could. It would do no good to keep Alana and Margot waiting.

****

“Hannibal, I’m home.”

He locked the door behind him, pulling off the blue raincoat hastily and hanging it down from the hook. He quickly ran up the stairs and into his room. After a quick shower, he drew out a pair of casual blue shirt that he quite liked and dark trousers, something Hannibal had insisted be made completely from the finest material available. Will didn’t particularly feel guilty about taking this out whenever he had to attend anything which required socializing because he had bought a pair of amethyst cufflinks for Hannibal from an year of savings and working over time that Hannibal had accepted with a genuine smile.

He wrestled with his hair for a good quarter of an hour and then admitted defeat and rushed out of his room almost barrelling into Hannibal who was—

Oh.

The older man was dressed in elegance itself , which wasn’t an uncommon sight but for the edge of something that was...*risqué* in the sharp cutting of the suit he wore. Or really the lack of it. Hannibal was dressed handsomely in a black silken shirt, the sleeves flowing along the lithe arms in a loose grip, held together with a shock of colourful cufflinks that was some kind of gemstone he hadn’t even heard the name of. His trousers was in sharp contrast to his shirt, white so pure and effortless that Will worried if he’d taint it with even another straying look at it. But even more shocking from than the unusual choice of his apparel was his hair. They were combed not along the side, but rather meticulously rippled back stylishly, Hannibal must’ve used some ort of gel to bring that effect but ever since Will could remember, he had never seen the man in anything out of his three piece suit or expensive pyjama suits.
Will was so lost in his shameless gawking that he didn’t notice Hannibal smirking ever so slightly at Will, clearly preening under the generous attention he was giving him.

“You are a sight to sore eyes, Will. The shirt bring out your eyes which you so adamantly try to hide.”

For the first time Will felt conscious of the black rimmed glasses that sat atop his nose, and he stopped himself before touching it, frowning at Hannibal. “We can stay here and you can psychoanalyse my glasses for the rest of the evening or we can actually attend the dinner.”

“You are looking forward to the dinner then.”

“Of course. Alana is my friend.”

“So she is. Shall we?” Hannibal offered his arm and Will flushed.

“We’re just going to the car.” Will muttered under his breath, slipping his own around the arm of the older man, who pulled him close.

“And I shall have the joy of your company. Let’s.”

They walked like that out to his car, Will didn’t mind when some of their neighbours stared at them curiously. He could finally be seen with Hannibal as not some awkward teenager with dubious motive hanging around the most desired bachelor of the society but as a man who happened to be someone whose company Hannibal actually enjoyed. And so he straighten his back, let his head held high and feel desired. Feel wanted by the man everyone desired. It was one heck of a trippy ride.

By the time they drew up near the driveway of the Verger estate, Will had began to feel jittery and the short-lived blast of confidence he felt from being Hannibal’s soulmate dulled before the oncoming rush of anxieties about meeting Alana outside of the familiarity of school, or Hannibal’s office. Home was a intimate space and Will was always stumbling his way through the tangles of intimacy all his life. He might not know Margot but he was aware that she was a purebred Verger, something like a royalty given to the sprawling meat business her brother and father had established. He knew how much Alana wanted to Will to meet with her wife, someone she claimed only met because of Will though how she never really elaborated. Will had to conduct himself with little more effort than he’d usually delegate to his socializing person-suit. He didn’t want to ruin this dinner. This was a chance as good as any to prove that he was worthy of being beside Hannibal Lecter.

A warm hand closed around his balled one on his lap.

Will stared into the calm sanguine brown eyes of Hannibal and breathed with the rhythmic pulses through the bond they shared. Hannibal gave him a smile that was filled with a want that Will no doubt reflected back only tinged with that ever pervasive doubt.

“You are beautiful dear Will. To have gotten the opportunity of spending this fine evening with you is a pleasure that I cherish.”

Will swallowed, nodded and swallowed once more for good luck.

“You’re too-" Will was thankful he didn’t fumble with his words then, “You look very...poignant.” He finished feeling like an utter idiot.

Hannibal’s lips quirked up in a devilishly handsome smile that shouldn’t make Will’s heart flutter like a suffocating bird inside his chest.
“*Poignant*, hmm. Now that’s an adjective that’s new to me.”

“Okay, alright. We’re already here, let’s not keep them waiting any longer.” Will said, and decidedly didn’t fidget his way out of the car and into the mansion, his arm around Hannibal’s and his entire body set ablaze.

How did he even imagine that this idea was going to work out?

After Hannibal spoke through the intercom, Alana voice filtered out and she buzzed open the door.

A sharp, tall and dangerously beautiful woman with straight blonde hair in a fashionable maroon dress suit stood to welcome them inside. She wore a pretty scarf around her neck, holding a glass of wine and, Will couldn’t help but notice the slight discolouration of the skin right above her perfectly groomed right eyebrow.

“Margot, you look stunning as ever.” Hannibal greeted and Margot smiled, which Will had the impression that was something she didn’t do often, and offered her hand that Hannibal took and kissed.

“And you are as charming as you were when little Will stumbled into your care from my brother’s, and I am surprised I haven’t forgotten about your charm in all these years.”

“Charm grows with experience and practise. I hope you had the luxury of time now that your brother is busy elsewhere to finally charm the board of brutish, old men who have been giving you trouble for the past year or so I heard.”

Margot's strenuous smile tightened though she replied pleasantly, “They are not important enough to busy our heads with. And it was kind of Mason to entrust me with the ‘serious’ work while he’s frolicking with some poor bastard in a high-end brothel in some European getaway. It’s always been something I wanted.”

“Be careful what you wish for.”

“Well, it brought me Alana so I’m quite happy with how things have turned out.”

“And that’s quite enough with the passive-aggression you two. I’d think that you’d behave in front of Will, but it was clearly asking too much.”

Alana walked into the doorway, looking absolutely remarkable in a floral yellow dress, kissing Margot briefly and squeezing her shoulder and then kissing Hannibal on his cheek which he returned. She turned to Will and there was a brief flash of uncertainty before she stepped forward and pulled him into a hug.

“I’m so, so glad that you’re here Will. But I’m also so very sorry. If I had known before, I’d have apologized to Hannibal but cancelled this dinner today.”

“Alana. Is everything alright.?”

“Will-"

“It’s a surprise that brought itself here. The parting gift my brother left.” Margot remarked taking a long sip from the glass of wine she was holding.
Hannibal had gone imperceptibly quite beside him. Will wanted to ask what was going on when a man’s lilting voice called out from inside, followed by footsteps.

“Is that *Caron Poivre* I smell?”

A man in his early thirties strolled outside, his hair a careful mess of tousled brown hair, drinking what seemed to be whiskey and grinning lopsidedly. His gaze zeroed on to Hannibal and he drank down the liquid with a flourish, walked up to Hannibal and embraced him with a deep familiarity.

Will stood there, feeling like he vanished.

Fire, so red and quick, spread through Will’s body that he was struck dumb by it. Will couldn’t help but get flashbacks of him being seventeen and desperately trying not to physically respond to the waves of thick pleasure he felt through the bond as Hannibal and this man lost themselves to their carnality upstairs.

The man finally let go of Hannibal, still staring with sickening longing at Hannibal.

Alana cleared her throat and glared pointedly at the man who shrugged carelessly.

“Can’t blame a man losing his sense of propriety when he meets the dream of his life after what must’ve been decades.”

“Good riddance.” Margot quipped.

“Each month longer than a year.”

“You are done with your Ph.D. thesis, Anthony?” Hannibal inquired politely.

“*Oh yes*! A hellish year it has been, beloved. Labouring under that Fell while he tried to claim my hard toiled work as his own was an endeavour I didn’t hope to complete. But I persevered, and here I am.” He spread his arms in a mocking bow.

“Uninvited and unwanted.”

“I had great expectations from Miss Bloom but it seems three years of a blessed marriage hasn’t still melted all the frigid ice from your shrivelled heart.”

Margot looked on stonily and then turned and left without a word.

“Anthony this is Will Graham,” Alana quickly interjected, “a promising and enterprising student at my academy and Hannibal’s soulmate. Will this is Anthony Dimmond, TA to one Professor Fell, a world renowned specialist on Dante.”

Anthony dragged his gaze away from Hannibal and to Will in surprise. He squinted at him for a moment before chuckling. “You’re the scrawny little lad who walked in on us that afternoon! By god, you’ve filled out deliciously. *Hannibal*, you’ve found yourself a pot of gold.”

“Anthony, enough.” Hannibal’s softly spoken words cut through the tense silence that Will had let to brew between them, ignoring the way that Hannibal was looking at him with an inquisitive face only made him want to punch the sliding smile right off the man’s face. He retreated his proffered hand and grinned.

“Not so keen on skin contact I see.”

“It’s difficult to know where and how a hand has been used whether that hand has seen a hard day’s worth or was naturally predisposed to cleaning out the nasal canal, I try to avoid hands whenever possible.”

Alana looked on with a mild horror on her face, she beseeched Hannibal to intervene who tilted his head and stepped up to where Dimmond was standing, assessing and then reassessing Will. Hannibal placed a hand on the small of his back and murmured, “We can continue this conversation inside, Anthony. Alana and Margot have been such a lovely host, it’ll be rude to say everything in our mind at the entrance to their home.”

Will pursed his lips, slid the glasses on his nose up and joined Alana as she ushered them inside with relief. Margot was already seated at the head of the long, dominating table laden with exotic food preparations, nursing another glass of wine that she gulped down on seeing them enter, then poured herself another one.

“He’s a funny guy, Will you’re a funny guy. No wonder *Hannibal* is so taken with you. I’m sure you appreciate his humour that almost always consists of puns."

Dimmond had taken the seat beside Hannibal who was sitting across Margot. Will stiffly joined Alana on the other side, facing Hannibal but not meeting his eyes.

“Really? Because it seems Hannibal has grown out of that habit of his.” Will answered.

The man shrugged, promptly taking a bite of the morsel before him and moaning unabashedly.

“Alana! I fear that your food can rival Hannibal’s on his worst his days.”

“Hannibal never has worst days.”

“And that’s just how delicious it is. And yes. I’m here on a work. I’m actually staying at a hotel until my conversation with the agent is wrapped up. It’s all very thrilling.”

Alana cleared her voice and raised a glass of clear liquid, ignoring Anthony Dimmond and instead gazing adoringly at Margot, who for the time being, had lost her hostile sharpness and instead returned the softness visible in Alana’s eyes.

“We might have met each other in an unconventional set of circumstances but we have managed to overcome every curve ball life had thrown at us. *Together*. You and Morgan are the best thing that has ever happened to me and I am so happy that I found you.” She then looked over at Will and he swallowed. “I know how hard and difficult it was for you when we met. Though I was a complete stranger, you trusted me to listen to you and listened to me in return, which I know is hard with all the talking that I do,” Will chuckled, he couldn’t help it. Alan’s smile was infectious. “And I know that us coming together would never have been possible if it weren’t for you. And Hannibal, thank you for being the best wing-man. I really appreciate it!”

Hannibal smiled and we all raised our glasses.

“Ah, *love*. I wish I could contribute with some resounding quote but I’m afraid my brain is a little buzzy. But cheers!” Dimmond tipped his glass and drained it empty, grinning impishly at Hannibal who didn’t react with anything at all.

“That would imply you had something barely resembling that to start with.” Margot retorted as Alana sighed.

Dimmond spared a languid glance at her, his posture in contrast to that of Margot's stiff and rigid countenance.

Will could feel the barb coming before the man even opened his mouth. He saw that Hannibal could feel it to, by the sharpness of his placid gaze trained at Margot.

“Margot, dear, are you still upset that I chose *Hannibal* over *you*? Honestly, you were always invited to join us. I don’t think either of us would have minded. Your brother certainly wouldn’t.”

“*That’s enough Anthony!* Would you excuse yourself from here.” Alana spoke tersely, glaring at the man who continued to stare at Margot. After a moment of tense silence, Dimmond smiled beguilingly and the scrape of the chair sliding against polished wood filled the air. He stood up, wobbling a little but steadying himself. He gave a short bow towards Alana, then leaned down over Hannibal, an arm snaking around his shoulder. Will watched those fingers press down on his flesh, saw the soft fabric of the shirt dent around those finger tips. He *l* Dimmond whisper something in to his ears and watched how a sheer smile curved around Hannibal’s lips. His fingers twitched on his laps.

“Tomorrow then, *dear Hannibal*. It was wonderful catching up with you all. Especially you, Will. Come and join me in one of my parties. It’ll be *your* kind of party, no doubt. Toodles.”

He left, leaving behind a bitter and terse evening that was supposed to be pleasant.

“I... I really apologise Hannibal, Will. We didn’t know that he was coming and couldn’t get to you in time because we had to send Morgan away. He shouldn’t stay here in his presence. I’m just...terribly humiliated and sorry for everything.” Alana said.

Margot remained quiet, sipping from her glass and not really looking at any of them.

“You shouldn’t be the one apologizing Alana. Nor should Margot. Anthony was out of line and rather...crude in the way he behaved today. But this evening is still salvageable as long as you agree to join me at the piano after dinner.”

Alana blushed, laughing and waved her hand. “Oh, I couldn’t! Really, Hannibal, I haven’t been near that thing for as long as we had it here.”

“Stop being modest and agree already Alana. At least then we’ll have the silver lining we’re all looking for. Laughing at you is better than laughing at this disaster.”

“Margot-"

“I would love to hear you play, Alana.”

She looked at Will surprised.

He gave her a reassuring smile.

“Well if you all insist. But I’ll stop the moment I hear a snicker.”

“Then it’s settled.”

And so the rest of the evening went without any further incident.

And if Will slipped out of the mansion, alone, then everyone very wisely didn’t comment on it and went on with the night as it unfolded.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully in the next chapter we'll get some answers!!

Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

This isn't really the best...i sat on this chapter for so long, still I'm not quite satisfied with it.
But oh well, life is throwing curve balls at me and I'm just trying to dodge them. Exams are near so i gotta focus on that. I'll probably not be able to update untill new year...I'm sorry. I'll still write. As much as i can.

^^^P.s. there's graphic depiction of Will having panic attack in the first latter half, in his scene with Beverley.And the content typical graphic murder talks. Please take care, everyone!^^^

It's Durga Puja where i come from. It's a festival of light and hope. So i really wish you all the best and hope you all find something good and happy in your life!!! <3 <3<3

Cheers!!
~~~

He waited pensively in the cafeteria, occasionally taking a drag of the rusty warm liquid that’s supposed to be coffee and trying not to compulsively look down at the watch.

Will knew that he was asking too much of Bev. She had her own plans of getting into the special program headed by Jack which was looking to recruit the best minds the Academy had to offer in order to set up another division of the behavioural sciences but one which was primarily concerned with soulmates and bonded pairs. It was still relatively a new area of discussion in the field of criminal psychology and behavioural sciences.

Soulmates only just started to be considered as an elementary aspect in criminology as recently as sixty years ago, still only confined in the realm of speculative psychological and post-modernist cultural studies. Their mutual interest in this subject had been largely why Will and Beverley started talking to each other. Beverley decided to stay afterwards mainly when she realized how miserable Will would be in a world without her in it.

Will was grateful for Beverley.
~~~

It was after a better half of an hour when he saw the tall woman making her way through the middling crowd over to where he was sat.

"I'm sorry I got held back by Dr Bloom. What is *that* that you're drinking. I hope you're not drinking that."

She wiggled her fingers at the affronting half-empty Nestle cup that had long gone cold as she took her place across him. Will sheepishly slid it aside, half shrugging.

"What's up with you anyway? You went completely white dwarf on me before spawning out of nowhere, with no explanation whatsoever. You even missed our date night."

Will cringed at the onslaught of Beverley's accusing eyes. He had been avoiding talking to her ever since he was cleared from hospital the first time around. He didn't think he could handle a proper conversation with anyone with how muddled things were inside his head. Given that those phantom aches and uneasiness had passed without him even noticing it had only just amplified the feeling of something was not right.

"I'm sorry. I promise I'll make it up to you. I was just not...feeling myself lately. It's odd. I don't know how to explain it really."

Beverley was still miffed but she had a worried look in her eyes.

"Is that because of your constitution?"

Will shrugged. He didn't really know.

Beverley shook her head, before turning and rummaging through her stuff in her bag and then taking out a file. She slid it towards him, grinning. "I don't know about the ethics of it all but I felt like those super techy geniuses in movies when I compiled all that I could on Georgia." But then she sobered up and looked away. "I never really knew her but with all that I could gather, she didn't really have anyone who was barely more than an acquaintance."
Will opened the file and flipped through the scant pages of Georgia's footprints in the Academy. There were the official papers on her registration to the Academy, her previous institutions. There were a number of disciplinary notes about her, mostly disrupting classes and disorderly behaviour. She spent a lot of time in the infirmary and barely ever showed up for classes. She had no parents listed but there was a name of a woman as the guardian. Will didn't know how Beverley could gather all this information , he wasn't even privy into her personal methods, but she had a name around the students as some sort of technological

wizard- sort and he was sometimes lucky to have her on his side. One thing however, stood out to him.

“These are Georgia’s autopsy reports.”

Beverley had her chin in her hand, smiling an innocent smile.

“You’re welcome.” Will swallowed. He knew she had connections, favours that people owed to her in almost every department everywhere. But he worried if she was safe doing all this snooping around. And he felt even more terrible given that it was him who asked her to get him anything that she could on Georgia.

His eyes traced the blurry image of her Facebook profile printed on the paper. It only showed half of her face, her golden hair a messy tangle around her. The wall behind her seemed to be bland. The picture was an unflattering one. There were only three people in her friends list. One of them was the one who was listed as her guardian. She hardly uploaded any pictures. There were few posts talking about inane things such as what she ate in the afternoon or the bus she missed. There were few about how afraid she was. Some were outright anxious. She believed there were people who were following her. Who lived in her house with her mother but she couldn’t see the strangers. Her last post was three months before her suicide. It was a picture of her feet on some sort of platform.

Will returned to the autopsy report. The examining officer was a Dr Price. He might have heard of that name being mentioned by Jack. It stated that Georgia’s health prior to the suicide pointed to severe malnutrition and dehydration. There were old and scabbed over injuries on her forearms, thighs, her stomach and shallow lacerations on her face, which were the freshest of the wounds she had on her at the time of her death along with a blunt force trauma at the back of her head. Though the wound had coagulated meaning that it had been inflicted some time before her jump. There were other bruises on her abdomen, arms and legs that would indicate assault. But most of the wounds sustained by her were self-inflicted. There was a note that there were prior surgeries she must have gone through, some sort of blunt trauma to the right side of her head that required stitches, as a result of an accident.

Unease settled uncomfortably inside him as he closed the file. They sat in companionable silence, Will trying too hard not to feel as isolated and lost as Georgia had felt, clearly struggling for a long time and largely ignored. Though she mentioned her mother several times in her posts, no where in the academic reports was a parent mentioned. And what was that with strangers living inside her house with her mother? Did it truly happen? Was someone really following her in real life, making her paranoid so much that her already pre-existing problems became amplified and she...

“Will,”

He looked up from the file. Beverley was staring at him sadly. “I had spoken with few of her classmates who remembered knowing her. They all had the same thing to say. Georgia was a quiet and weird girl, who wanted to be an officer. She would sometimes be lost in her daydreams but was altogether unremarkable. But there was something that a few of them mentioned. They said that Georgia was in an accident almost eight to nine months ago. After she returned she had been acting up strange. She’d become skittish, would mumble a lot to herself and kept her distance form everyone even more than what was normal.”

“And they didn’t ask why it was like that?”

“I don’t think they really knew her as a person.”

Will said nothing. He didn’t understand why he was so worked up by this. Georgia was someone. And now she wasn’t. Why did he feel so restless?

“It isn’t your fault Will. There was nothing you could’ve done.”

“I know!” Will started then closed his eyes briefly, counting to ten before reopening them.

“I’m sorry. What you did, it’s more than I could’ve asked. Thank you Bev. And I know that it wasn’t my fault. Or anybody’s I guess. I didn’t even know her until she died. And that...that I think is what is getting me so worked up.”

“Not knowing her before she died?”

Will shook his head. “Dying so alone.”

As he spoke these words the sticky and prickly sensation in his guts formed into a cohesive darkness that buzzed loudly in his periphery. He trained his eyes towards the amorphous cloud of negativity that loomed just there, drowning away the busy hub of people in the cafeteria and plunging it into a hall leeched off colours and life. The mass shifted nervously and shook terribly before splattering away into ether leaving in its place a tall, but lanky and slouching figure of a woman who was almost the same age aa him. Her white-blonde hair were clotted with blood, the side of her face completely indistinguishable. She stared at Will placidly and then jumpstarted into movements that were jerky and glitching : something out of a low-res videogame jumpscare. But Will was stuck to his seat -he couldn’t move- and only followed Georgia Madchen's ghost stockily walking out of the cafeteria.

"-*kay*? Hey! Will. Focus on my voice. *Will*!"

He choked on his spit as he tried to swallow around a dry patch in his throat. Coughing into his hands he tried to say that he was okay but Beverley wasn't having any of that. She tried to count him down, her hand gripping his arm, rooting him down to the reality and her clear and enunciated breathing slowly, so very slowly allowing Will to finally make his lungs work. He didn't even realize he was having an attack. Even the most basic exercise of breathing racked up a burning storm inside his chest. He was suddenly aware of the worried and curious faces that stopped to see his embarrassing spectacle. He couldn't really get a sense of his extremities but the urge to curl into a tiny ball and wish himself out of existence was becoming pressing.

Beverley, bless her soul, understood Will's discomfort and barked a rough statement about him being fine and they could turn on Netflix if they wanted to see dramas, promptly sending the watchers on their way. Will gritted his teeth, trying to become normal as soon as he could. He never had a public attack like this. Not in school, never in front of Beverley. Other times, there were only Hannibal and Jack to witness him losing his control like this, and the occasional members on Jack's team who soon learnt to pretend he never existed under the brunt of Jack's grim stare, but something like this to happen now—he was losing what little order he had in his life. Everything was falling apart, every single semblance of order and discipline he had created around him; they were cracking and peeling off all around him. Once again Will was being made a mere spectator in his own life and he had nothing to do about it.

How does that make you feel Will?

Angry.

When his lungs no longer felt it would shrivel up any second he shakily stood up, Beverley giving him space though she remained standing. He didn't think he could speak. He didn't want to see what Beverley thought. He had seen the reactions he had on people around him – intrigue, sympathy...pity. Beverley was an angel and the only friend he had for so long. He didn't want to push her way. He knew he would if he saw her face. So he mumbled his gratitude in a raw voice and shook his head when Beverley insisted that he should see the nurse. Will walked away in a pace that didn't border on something one could call fleeing and after that, it was a little hazy. How exactly he had reached his car was muddy. He chose not to think about it. Instead he drove to his work, focusing on the road and tried, desperately tried not to think about how he might be losing his mind.

****

He did have an inkling of guilt for rushing in and out of home leaving Winston alone. He had been so happy to see him, slobbering him with all his love and solitude and Will's heart had cracked under the unasked love he had for Will that he became weak enough to stay back. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't face Hannibal when he felt so twisted and mean-spirited. The soulbond pulsed softly inside his mind and he felt it like a ringing pain. He was confused. He was afraid. He was unsure. He didn't know what he wanted and what he perceived he wanted. If Hobbs and Georgia could so easily borrow inside him...could bleed into his reality so easily...what was to say that everything he felt wasn't just some product of his constitution? He fed Winston and took him out for a brisk walk. After petting him for what felt like hours, Will finally scurried out of the house and drove to his appointment.

To add more into the mix of his nerves, Alana had emailed him about Chilton finally relenting and fixing an unofficial session with Johnson without the security cameras. Though he insisted on recording the session on tape for academic purposes and Jack had to give something return for Chilton's confidentiality. Will could almost vividly imagine the excitement in Chilton's greasy eyes if Jack had been more desperate and allowed to lend Will more than an extension to this case. He'd just *love* to have his grabby hands all over Will's head. His constitution made him such a foil and fodder to those pencil-licking wannabes: such an unusually high level of empathy coupled with possible autistic characteristics and peculiar aversion to social situations. With a traumatic past and unstable mental state, it's a wonder he was able to make any sort of connection at all. Oh, he knew all the medical jargon that got these people's snickers in twist. And wouldn't they all want to have what Dr Lecter so effortlessly possessed? Too bad. No one really wants damaged goods. Not even those who claim they do.

Pulling into the winding drive-way he saw the quaint cabin-like house at the end of it. The neighbourhood was quite posh though not as upstate as Hannibal's and Molly's house was pretty modest compared to other residential buildings in the block. Though she had let it known in one of their many tangents of conversations that she had actually purchased the entire plot along with the house and had it rebuilt in the way she wanted. With a white picket fence and a small domestic farm at the backyard where she grows an assorted variety of vegetables. She had always wanted to be a farmer, Molly had chuckled. But then she got accepted into the John Hopkins and her farming kife was taken up by another Molly in some other world.

He knocked three times then nervously stared at the worn out front of his favourite boots. The soles were looking much frayed. He might have to shop for another pair of boots soon.

And that would require him to actually walk into a shop. He still didn't quite get the hang of online shopping, especially when it came to his shoes or dress.

The wooden door clicked open and a warm, cozy light illuminated a short brunette ushering Will inside. The inside of Molly's chamber was just as comfortable as the person herself was. There dewy and earthy tones on the wallpapers and the draperies and curtains were ordinary but not bland. A large shelf occupied most of the room, from one corner to the other. There were no desks but two sofas and three chairs were lazily strewn about before a fireplace that was presently cackling and throbbing lively. Will took his seat on the chair closer to the bookshelf as he had got into a habit in tge three weeks he had been seeing her twice a week.

Molly plopped down across the rocking-chair and handed Will a steaming cup of chocolate with- Will had to double-check- marshmallows.

He raised his brows at her and she giggled, waving her hand and taking a hearty sip from her own cup.
"It had been so wet and bleak for days. I've never seen it rain so much in Baltimore. But today was fairly sunny and it's always good to treat yourself once in a while. So I thought : why not? Cheers."

Will curiously took a sip himself and found his rigid countenance almost melting away with the silky texture of the hot, sweet-bitter taste of the chocolate - rich and supple on his tongue. There was also a hint of something else but he couldn't quite place it.

"Is there salt in it?" he wondered.

Molly looked quite pleased and nodded. "Just a sprinkle of it on top. And a little bit of dry cardamom powder and clover grinded into tiny bits mixed with marshmallows that came from a very prestigious Walmart. Its a secret though. So don't tattle on me. My grandma used to make this for us when I was young. Said it'd cure any sickness of mind or body alike."

"I think your grandma was right."

"She always was. So Will. How's Winston?"

"He's great. Really energetic." He chewed on a marshmallow and swallowed it down with some hot chocolate. "But I can't be there for him as much as I should."

"Oh. Why's that?"

Will mulled over what to say. But then he had asked Molly to reschedule their appointment so he might as well make it productive.

“I don’t want to see H-Dr Lecter.”

Molly allowed the words to settle between them. There was a soft, almost indistinct music playing somewhere in the house. It had a chirpy almost sunny note to it. It filled the silence nicely and Will found himself relaxing even more. The hearth only added much need heat into his weary bones.

“Why do you think that?”

“I-I guess I am still not sure about the relationship we have. I mean I know that it’s not common for soulmates to find each other and even rarer still for them to be actually compatible in their given circumstances. I know I should feel thankful for an opportunity that most people would squander their entire livelihood to have but I can’t help but feel...feel-"

Molly only drank from her cup her eyes giving room to Will’s bulging emotions to breathe.

“I don’t know how I feel. I think I do at a given moment of time but then something happens and I begin to ask myself if everything I feel is because I was supposed to feel like that as a soulmate and not because I’m a soulmate since I feel that way. Do you understand?”

Molly kept the cup down on a small tool beside her. She leaned forward and held her hands out in front if the fireplace.

“Even though serious research and enquiries have begun into looking into the science and pattern behind soulmate phenomenon nothing concrete has come out of it yet. It has been around since the ancient times. We can see it being referenced in scriptures and celebrated in some cultures. It was also considered a taboo to openly speak of it and even the practice of actively searching for your soulmate was considered a sin not too long ago. We’ve made so much progress since then and I’m still baffled with how little we actually have come to know about it. What determines two or more people to be destined to be so compatible to each other? Is it merely evolutionary feature? Simply genetic coding or is it something more than that? Is our consciousness truly attached with another’s befor we’re even born? Or does it happen after? If so, what are the requirements? Why do some people have multiple instances of having soulmarks where none ever do? If soulmates are supposed to be so perfect for each other then why are there a statistically more crime rates between bonded or expectant bonded-pairs than those without it? If we were always supposed to love this person we never

knew, why do people choose to love someone completely different even after meeting their fated, and live as happily as mortal life permitted?"

She sighed, then took her cup and sipped. "When I try to answer these questions I find myself trying to grapple for some semblance of a pattern. Of something that would just click in my head and I'll be like : of course! That's why it's so. And everything will be completely clear. Though I'm just starting out and have a long way to go, I think what we all make a serious mistake is in assuming people are singular. Or plural in a singular, categorical sense. People can't really be labelled and defined in a linear, simply teleological manner. I don't think they can. Over 400 cases that I've looked into and still will do in future only points out how different each individual case was. Though I can establish some similarities some differences in few of these cases, I can't really box them into one or the other.

"Will, I know that you have a really unique constitution – one which is so dependent on the connection you share with your soulmate. And even if what you have is so palpable and tangible into the real world where most of us only get constitutions like being able to colour very well when together or eat a lot of lasagne or even be a very good marksman, yours is something which is entirely independent of what your soulmate has for a constitution. I will never ask for information you do not wish to divulge Will, but from the only two times that you've spoken to me of your soulmate, I think what you can do is try to know them outside of the boxes that you have drawn for yourself and for him. I think that so far you've only seen Dr Lecter as your soulmate. Have you ever asked how he was before you two met each other? Has he ever asked that of you? And if he has, have you ever responded?"

Will's mind was reeling. Now that every single thought was so clearly untangled and laid down before him to investigate individually, he couldn't help but realise that it was this that was blocking him from talking with Hannibal. Ever since he had actively become conscious of their soulbond he had been so preoccupied with the whys and hows of their relationship that he had never stopped to look and see the man. Because at the end, that's just what they were. Two men. Nothing more and nothing less.

Will had made Hannibal into something so infallible and so untouchable as an idealistic version of what he truly was that he had lost all touch with the reality of them. He wanted Hannibal to see him as a man when he himself never considered himself to be one. He had always seen himself as the pathetic teenager abandoned by his parents, left to be a burden to his new psychiatrist who turned out to be his soulmate.
But things were never so simple. Even now, though what Molly had said resonated something inside of Will that he had been stubbornly ignoring, there were still many things he had to understand and find out. But Will already felt so tired. It had been a long day and the chocolate and the heat had made his body lethargic and all he wanted was to sleep.

"It's difficult not to be blindsided when everything and everyone around you normalizes a way of thinking from the moment you are born."

Molly grimaced and nodded her head in sympathy. “I have people coming to me seeking for some sort of retribution for thinking about themselves for a moment and not abide by every whim of their soulmate like it was some atrocity they had committed. Even to this day. Those days are the hardest and really make me wonder if it’s too early for retirement.” She chuckled sadly.

“You’re really not like other counsellors Molly. Trust me, I’ve seen my fair share of those creatures. But you’re...you’re good. You do so much good for other people. If you did take a permanent vacation then I’d think it’s too early.”

Molly shrugged good naturedly and urged Will to finish his cup before leaving for that session.

“You can request for a reschedule anytime Will, there’s really no need to be so hesitant. Although the hours I have to give as an associate of the hospital are fixed I always try to keep my private practice schedule flexible. Problems never come by the hours so unless I’m already involved otherwise I should be able to give you an hour. So next time, just inform me minus the profuse apologies.”

“Will do. Goodnight, Molly.”

“Have a safe trip back home, Will.”

****

After he tucked Winston into bed – which was right beside him on the right- he decided that sleep was a good option if it came to him. He had eaten the food Hannibal had left for him in neat little Tupperware, still warm and delicious as ever. His belly was filled and the rain outside poured into his mind. He opened the windows but drew the curtain. The chilly wind with a smattering of rain fell against his skin. He closed his eyes against the downpour, thankful for the peace it brought to him. He walked upto his bed, drawing the blankets over him and Winston, letting the mattress beneath him lull him to sleep.

He must have dozed off still not completely asleep when he felt the mattress dip behind him. For a moment he went still, his heart locking inside his chest; but then he felt the odd reverberating pain through his bond. It pulsed weakly and almost felt like it was moaning in pain. Will didn't know if it was him that send those signals or if it was Hannibal's. He didn't move though, only lay there on his side, his arm awkwardly stuck underneath him. Hannibal must have known he was awake now. Winston's bushy tail was wagging right onto Will's face though he was too lazy to actually get up. Hannibal didn't speak, so Will stayed quiet. He watched him petting Winston twice on the head, who eagerly smothered his fingers with his wet snout. If Hannibal was perturbed by it Will didn't know. Hannibal didn't touch him, though Will couldn't understand his own disappointment. Was he expecting Hannibal to touch him? But why would he expect that? He was sure if Hannibal did he was going to bite more meanly than Winston ever would.

But maybe Hannibal knew that too. So he didn't touch Will. He didn't do anything at all. After a while even Winston was lost to sleep. Will didn't know what it was about the older man's presence, but his eyes soon grew heavy and he felt at ease. Soon Hannibal had just become like the softly beating pulse shared between them.

Hannibal was gone the next morning when he woke up.

There was a tall cup of freshly brewed coffee and chocolate scones on his bedside table.

Will oddly felt guilty for a wrong he didn't think he committed.

****

Will knew the day was going to go bad when the first thing to greet him in the morning was Chilton's too trying suave grin.

Albeit it was his hospital and he had taken a certain amount of risk, allowing a student with no necessary credentials to interview one of their most notorious criminals who had caused quite a stir back in those days. But still Will had been hopeful. He could spot Alana's car so

that was a relief. Being alone with Chilton wasn't something he was looking forward to. Will intentionally didn't move after stepping out of his car, only blankly staring at the sparse trees around thr building, right behind Chilton. The other man was quite taken aback by Will's blatant disregard for the courtesy he sure had deemed to grace Will with, but not doing well in social interactions was one of the favourite things doctors liked to write about him, and Will really wasn't above using it for his own arguably petty gains.

As Chilton awkwardly approached Will still holding onto the smug confident smile, Will contended that he *really* wasn't above using his own apparent diagnosis.

What a naughty boy you are Will. What's to be done about that?

"Will. You are looking quite well today. Red is quite a bold look on you."

"Can't say the same thing about you."

"Excuse me?"

"Isn't Jack here?"

"Straight to the business. I like that about you, Will. May I call you Will? Let's walk together since we finally have this opportunity. Hannibal finally stopped being a mother hen long enough to let you out of the nest. Would you like to see around the facility--"

"I wasn't aware that Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane housed a entertainment gig."

Beverley had often complained about his monotonous way of speech. He was quite grateful that it came in handy again because Chilton looked to be at a loss of words, opening and closing his mouth while they entered the building.

One thing that Will noted was the place was well guarded outside, with two sets of electronic gates opening with biometric passwords and Ids. However the more they ventured inside he couldn't help but wonder why there were more orderlies and nurses than there were armed guards. The entire thing was under surveillance so that was one safety measure, Will assumed, too keep those inside safe from the outside world. Chilton chattered about his

upcoming book that was allegedly very well received amongst his peers, how he had overhauled the entire management and security system of the place and actually expend into problem of providing the inmates with rich nutritional diets that tasted better than average. Will didn't respond but so as to not come off as completely an asshole, he smiled to show that he was listening. Judging from the confused and disappointed look on Chilton's face though Will inferred that his timing must have been slightly off.

When they finally reached Chilton's office he could weep in happiness at seeing the lovely Alana greeting him with an angelic smile that rivalled Will's sour mood.

"Will,"

"Alana."

"So, Will. Take a seat please." Chilton crossed his legs with a relish, leaning back into his black leather chair and resting his chin on his fingers in a manner that distantly reminded Will of Hannibal's 'I'm- listening-But-I'm-Disinterested' gesture.

"It's really unfortunate, " he began over Alana when she was about to speak, staring at Will faking disappointment. "That horrid article that got plastered everywhere on the tabloids. Whoever could have done such a petty thing behind Jack's back, I wonder. Though it's no secret that he is a rather *polarizing* man—he has as many admirers as he does those who're willing to see him in a rather sticky situation. And Lounds really knew where to hurt the most. It was rather fortunate that Hannibal's word is *so...valuable* in the community, otherwise the scandal would've been far more difficult to manage for Jack alone."

"It's a matter of the past, and Lounds is nothing if not resourceful. Also, Frederick, let us not forget that Will is professionally trained. He is as much a part of Quantico as much I am."

"Of course, dear Alana. Will is quite a stalwart when it comes to his academics. His research paper has already created a buzz amongst us scholars. Nothing less can be expected of him. However, it was quite unfortunate that he couldn't pass the psych eval. I had urged Hannibal to let Will see a more professionally adept psychiatrist than those two-dimensional wooden planks you find in the Bureau, but alas! Hannibal was quite adamant in his own stance."

"Dr Chilton," Will said fixing the man with his patient gaze. "Are we going to wait until Jack arrives or can we start with the interview right away?"

"Not needed. Frederick, I hope everything is prepared?" Jack marched into the office, arresting everyone's attention and holding it sternly.

Chilton cleared his voice, a little put off for being cut in his attempt to make Will squirm and instead done on his professionalism and addresses gleefully.

“Indeed. Johnson was in a ‘mood' after I told him that he was getting a visitor after seven years almost. He put up a little tantrum but we had a talk and he was willing to grant our Will some of his time. However he was quite adamant that it be not a minute more than thirty.”

Jack crossed his arms.

Now, Jack Crawford was an intimidating man just by the dint of his sheer presence. But he was quite an imposing figure when he deliberately flexed his built. No man his worth could ever wear the stare down. The only one immune to it was Hannibal. And Bella, but Jack never dared to ever hold a staring contest with her.

“We had a deal Frederick. You give me an hour, I let you record the session.”

Chilton smirked. “A little correction if I may, Jack. The BSHCI is my second home. *I* am in charge of how and when things are run. Nothing escapes my eyes. And I am afraid that it is state policy that I can’t, goodwill, go against the inmate’s wishes if he or she doesn’t allow any interview of any sort. Now, I’ve already put my neck on line for you Jack. I can’t lend you more than that.”

Jack gritted his teeth, Will could see the inevitable chewing out that was on its way and thought better to interject now. The sooner he could get out of this damn building the better.

“Fine. Let’s go.”

“Will,”

“I know what I’m doing Jack. Johnson will either have a connection to the killer or he’ll not. There’s no other possibility.”

Jack looked from Will to Chilton and then sighed loudly. “Fine.”

“Excellent!” Chilton ringed in someone. A short, greying man stepped inside with the orderly uniform.

“Will, this is Barney. He will escort you to Johnson. And he’ll tell you the instructions as well. Do not deviate from them.”

Will threw a glance over his shoulder to Alana who gave him a pensive smile.

She was still against this entire experiment. Even though Johnson wasn’t the worst of the lot housed here, his crimes were of a graphic and brutal nature. He relished in the deviancy, in the brutality of his aftermath for shock value. Will had seen his files. He had also seen the photographs, much to Alana’s loud advice. His stigmatas were particularly nerve-wrecking, especially without Hannibal there. But he had to learn to deal with it without Hannibal.

“Stay behind the line, there’s a tool kept there for your ease. Don’t provoke him too much, do not be abusive and do not cross the line. You’ll be fine.” Barney said once we had reached the holding cells. He could see the chair kept at a distance. “He’s normally a quiet bloke. Keeps to himself. Talks about his son a lot. Might even talk to about him to you, but you don’t talk about him yourself. It’s a touchy subject. Here, I’ll let you do your job. And don’t cross the line.” Then he walked away, leaving Will in the empty but raucous corridor. Will didn’t pay attention to the jeering and jibes some inmate threw his way as he made his way over to Johnson’s cell. He kept his head straight and eyes straight ahead.

He stopped before the metal tool. Right across him was a man in his late fifties with dirty blond hair that was now more white than blond. He was not very tall but his size more than made it up for it. He had scraggly beard and, Will paid close attention, black eyes. He was currently seated on his bed far in the corner, watching Will watch him.

He struck Will as being intelligent.

“Mr Johnson, my name is Will Graham. May I take a seat.”

He didn’t react. Only watched Will in those vulture-like beady eyes of his.

Will didn’t move. It was important that Johnson talked to him. Jack had called him in the morning and informed him that they had apprehended one Mathias Clark, paranoid out of his mind and almost begging the FBI to put him into prison. He had confessed to all murders, had provided details that were not disclosed to the public. He had no alibi as he was a squatter, Jack’s men only finding him through an almost orchestrated miscalculation on Clark's part – he had been caught milling about in a gas-station joint in the perfect range of the security footage- but Jack still had a nagging sense about things not being as they seemed. Clark was too hysterical and delirious to carry out a systemic series of murders such as these.

The man across from him finally moved, gesturing with his hand for him to take a seat.

“You’re not FBI.”

Will nodded. “I’m only working with them.”

Johnson raised a brow. “They let a kid do their footwork now?”

“Mr Johnson, I would like to ask you some questions. You may or may not choose to answer them. Is it alright with you?”

“I’m not going anywhere, boy.”

“Thank you. Do you find it difficult?”

Johnson frowned. “You’ve gotta be more specific than that.”

“Is it difficult to rot away in this cell with no outside contact for seven years?” Johnson twitched. It was almost imperceptible but Will was looking out for it. He had to be straightforward with him. He had a clock ticking away behind him.

“I think I’ll sit on that one.”

“Of course. I hear that Dr Chilton takes very good care of the inmates. He did mention about the nutritious meals he provides for you. Do you think they are good?”

Johnson scoffed, his previous animosity forgotten briefly over the commonly shared jab.

“My wife could cook better shit than the abysmal drivel that little cocksucker likes to feed us. But you’re not here to talk about that. I know what you wanna know. The good men outside talk about stuff happening all around. Really tragic, *those poor children.”*

Will nodded affirming. “Yes. It is indeed tragic. But you’re not too pleased with them are you. They are trying to take credit for the work you so tirelessly did. Their measly attempt at emulating the sheer shock of your crimes is nowhere to be worthy. You’ve heard about the

various journals and tabloids speaking about the crime. Yours was the most scandalous in the recent years of Baltimore. It's only a matter of time when others will begin to see the odd similarities between your work and theirs."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I never did no thing."

Will saw Johnson. He saw his hand flexing on his thigh. Saw the depthless void in those eyes. Eyes...

"They found a mansion jar filled with the eyes of your victims. All no more than 12."

"Someone put it there," he said. "I was a honest salary man, boy. I had a loving wife and a kid. I had everything. If it weren't for you little fuckers I'd still have it all! I said, it wasn't me. I did nothing to no child! I could never!"

"The new killer seems to be equally fascinated with eyes. Why do you think it is?"

"*Fuck you!* I don't wanna speak no more. Get your ass outta here!"

"Why is the killer so fascinated with the eyes Mr Johnson?" The man was now on his feet, pacing and bellowing like a caged animal. His eyes were bloodshot. He was shaking with rage. Will could see in his periphery Barney and few others opening the gates. He had no time.

"What is the colour of your son's eyes Mr Johnson? Is it the same shade of green as your victims?"

"*FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU, YOU FUCKING CUNT! IT WASN'T ME! I DID NOTHING!"*

Will stood up. "Thank you for cooperating Mr Johnson."

Will walked away in the wake of a barrage of expletives. Some orderlies running past him while Barney escorting him outside.

"I said no provoking."

“I’m sorry.”

Chilton’s face was drawn up in a manner as if he had sucked on a rather sour lemon. Jack was frowning at Will as he came.

“You were supposed to talk to him Graham. Not antagonize him.”

Will hummed, standing in front of a window in the office, trying to gather all his thoughts.

“Will, are you alright?” Alana asked.

“Yes,” Will said, turning back. “Where is Johnson’s son?”

“He had to change his name and move away. The entire ordeal had blown up. His mother couldn’t bare the strain. The last official records of him state that he went to live with one of his aunts. But why? Did you figure something out?”

Will bit his lip. He wasn’t so sure yet. Everything else was so neatly arranged. If what Will was thinking was true then....

“Jack I want to speak to the victims' families.”

“Will-" he began but Will cut him off.

“I think I have the clue. Not clue but ... I have to be sure before I implicate anything.”

“The families have already been questioned thoroughly Will. And I don’t think that they’d cooperate asking them to come for interrogation after such a tragedy had struck them.”

“Only the fathers Jack. Please.”

“You can’t conduct any interviews Will.”

“But Alana can.” Will argued. “I only need to be present there. Please Jack. We have to do this before the killer makes his next move.”

“You’re sure it’s a him?”

“Yes Alana. I am completely sure.”

Jack didn’t speak but only walked out of the office, followed by Alana and Will.

Outside, Alana stopped him before parting their ways.

“Will. I wanted to apologise for what happened that day. We really didn’t know that he was going to come. And his conduct had been so uncalled for. I’m really sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologise on other’s behalf Alana. And it’s all fine.”

“Will,”

“Hey. I’m not a child anymore, Alana. I promise you, I can take care of myself.”

Alana smiled. “Of course. I know that. I just- no. You’re right. I have to consciously remind myself sometimes that you’re all grown up now. And anyways, I had forgotten to tell you in all this mess. Abigail called me the previous weekend. She was asking about you.”

Will reined in his surprise. He had...almost forgotten about her.

“Oh. H-how is she?”

“She’s doing fine so she tells me. Though Toronto is a little too peaceful she said. Her neighbourhood was so good that it was almost boring. I was glad to know that she had made a new friend there. Oh, but I can’t quite remember her name.”

“That’s...that’s good for her.”

Alana eyed him knowingly. “You are allowed to talk to her if you want you know.”

Will smiled which was little more than a grimace. “I know.”

“She expressed that she’d like to hear from you.”

“I know.”

Alana clasped his hand, looking at Will with her flushed cheeks and kind eyes. “Abigail considers you as her friend. Trust me.”

“What about your doctor-patient confidentiality?”

Alana rolled her eyes. “Fine then smartass.”

Will shrugged but cracked a smile.

When Will was driving back to home, a conversation that he had with Jack shortly after Hobbes had been dealt with played incessantly in his mind. Even after three months, he was just as much unsure and unwilling to accept the possibility of what Jack said. But it might just be true in the present case.

_____

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Another filler chapter. I'm sorry...but hope it's interesting enough.

Chapter Notes

First thing first,,,,I...have not written much. I didn't end up writing as much as I thought I would. I had planned for writing at least 4 chapters but only ended up writing, re-writing then scraping this one chapter for at least 3 separate times. This year is a bit of a mixed bag and I never thought writers block was a thing, like really, until it smacked me across my face and asserted its dominance.
This chapter was not WIlLING to be written!!!! But I just couldn't keep it sitting on my drive hoping it would write itself and I'd be able to move on. So this is...a short-ish chapter.
I'm just really sorry, to everyone. But so, so, sooo SOOOO grateful for your support. You don't know how much it means to me, that each and everyone of you have been here this far. For that I really truly LOVE all of you and just,,am so grateful!!!💓

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The phone call she had been waiting for the last two months came when she was having a really bad day.

“Yeah?”

“Miss Katz? This is Olson. From the Florentine.”

Beverley knocked over the bowl of mac and cheese she was having on her way to grab a pen and a notepad from across her room.

“Yes. Hello. I thought you were supposed to contact me a week prior.”

“Yes, but this case is highly under wrap here. No one actively talks about the blunder of the decades that the politzia made. This goes back all the way to the top. I had to resort to...unsavoury methods, let’s just say, to gather these articles for you. You owe me big one Miss Katz.”

Beverley could almost feel all the stress of the week vanishing with the passing seconds.

“Yes! Yes, of course! You can quote on me that Olson. So are you going to send me-"

“It’s already packaged. I’ve took the liberty to print it out and sent it your way before I called you.”

“Oh, but you could just have emailed me or faxed-"

“Haven’t you been paying any attention?” Olson's vowels became more muddled as he got irritated and his very sharp accent became almost impenetrable.

“ I said this case is very sensitive. The once renowned Mr Pazzi is still ostracized in an off hand manner in a daily news channels once every day. This entire thing, is cursed. I don’t know why you are so interested, but the ‘Il Monstro' has never brought luck to anyone.”

“Yeah I understand. But I’ll be fine I think. Thank you so much Olson. I’ll text you once it arrives. You dont have any idea of how much this means for my project!”

“You’re out of your mind. Do what you want, Miss Katz just remember- no one caught the real Il Monstro.”

And Beverley didn’t delude herself into thinking that she was going to crack a twelve year old cold case of certain international notoriety, but she was hopeful.

Before, her hypothesis about the link that her mind had been obsessing over was missing a very important part that would ground it to her reality. She couldn’t establish a coherent timeline that would link these cases together, even if it was at most, circumstantial. With these authentic contemporary articles, she could finally get a reference of all the facts that would be essential going forward. She had managed to get the coroner reports and the police documents of few of the cases. These articles would be godsend. Even if it would only suffice for a theory.

And even if she didn’t want to, she tried her best to come up with the facts by herself, she

couldn't create a profile that would support her hunch about theses very different and disparate cases. Once she had her theory somewhat drafted, she had to ask Will to show her the jumps she couldn't make right.

Killing felt ordinary.

It was something that Will was lost in, trying to parse out his own state of being shortly after the act he had committed.

He was sitting at the back of an ambulance with an ugly looking brown-red blanket draped around him, someone running a soothing hand at his back instead of throwing him inside a police van and locking him up for good. Will felt it would be the natural progression of his all too meaningless life. He had no parents, he had no friends, he had no future. He was stuck with a soulmate who was so beyond his reach that it was an entirely another plane of existence, and frankly, he was tired of dying but never remaining dead.

As people who moved in swatches of colours that Will couldn't quite focus on hurried and ran from Hobbes house to the vans, Will thought back on how ordinary it felt, to have taken a life. The hands which had done the act, which had pummelled Hobbes face into the wooden floor of his house after he had almost killed his own daughter, were nursing a cup of warm milk. He stared at his bandaged wrists. The paramedics had advised Will not to strain them too much. He could see ugly, purplish bruises swelling around his wrists. Hobbes had sneaked in quite a few punches on him as well. The side of his chest hurt, his ribs were probably bruised. Hobbes had flailed his armed hand way too close to his face and there was a nasty cut running along his right cheek to the end of his jaw. The glasses he had on were splattered with his blood. He had blood on his face. On his shirt, the one Hannibal had bought for him – had smiled looking pleased when Will chose to wear it for what was supposed to be a normal stake out until Jack and his team arrived - only to observe and not interfere.

He still had Garett Jacob Hobbes blood on his tongue and he felt like he could finally *BREATH*.

Everything until then had been so constricted. Will almost imagined a noose around his neck that tightened like a vice every time he chose for himself.

But now...

Now he saw the sun light brimming with a spark that he had never seen before. He saw the people around him so drab and pedantic, and he felt like how he'd feel when he'd see an ant scurrying along the wall, following the one which came before it and so, so very apprehensive of everything.

After the first few minutes of exertion and the adrenaline washed out of his system - because killing is extremely difficult - he didn't feel exceptional. He didn't feel bad for killing the man. He had killed eight young girls. He was about to kill his daughter. But...

But that wasn't why he reacted did he.

Will stared at the road where the ambulance carrying Abigail Hobbes and Hannibal Lecter had left half an hour ago.

As per protocol given Lecter's active involvement in the case, he had approached Hobbes home in order to confirm whether Hobbes indeed lived there, since his name wasn't on the register where he worked as a plumber. It was supposed to be a brief interaction. Dr Lecter had dressed down considerably for the occasion, wearing a normal beige three piece suit with a floral tie, trying to come off as a high-end salesman of sort.

But then it took him more than five minutes to return and the bond, though incomplete, had surged with something so violent that Will had almost keeled over, his chest seizing. Something must have happened to his soulmate.

After that, he had run towards the house, coming across the dead body of Hobbes' wife. He had stuttered to a halt when he saw Dr Lecter standing in a corner of the kitchen, and right across him stood Hobbes with a sobbing girl who was almost the same age as him.

But Will's blood had already began to steam.

Blood, in thin rivulets ran down his soulmate's left arm. It had gathered into a small pools below him but he gave no indication of being bothered by the pain. Dr Lecter's lips had moved. He remembered that. But his face had also gone a bit funny, like an amateur having a go at photoshop: his face had a weird double exposure to it, having two pairs of eyes and a really weird nose. But then Will's eyes slid down to the blood on the floor. When Abigail had squealed in terror as Hobbes had started to draw his hand, something happened.

One moment Will was standing, the next he had Hobbes on the ground. He was both younger, and wider than what Hobbes was. And he had his soulmate sense firing up every nerve inside of him. It was peaceful. *It was chaotic*.

But then the same wounds that he inflicted on Hobbes began to bloom all over Will. Their blood began to mix, undistinguishable from one another. In his last moments, Hobbes had whispered broken off words that echoed from Will's own mouth until Will died, with Hobbes.

"*See*? ***Do you see?***"

The murder of Garrett Jacob Hobbes was officially declared as killed in police confrontation. Since Will had acted on his soulmate instinct in order to protect and defend his soulmate from a legitimate threat, Will was not charged but he was made to do community service and mandatory therapy sessions.
Freddie Lounds had been miffed when the entire case had been sealed tighter than an air seal. She couldn't get anything on what had actually happened. Only that Hobbes was dealt with when he tried to attack a police personnel. Will hadn't yet known of her infamy. She had gotten more traction publically after her sensational reporting on the Minnesota Shrike Case, something she dubbed, but was later disappointed to know that Hannibal had known of her even before that.

When he was allowed to get out of the home as his one month observation period was over, he had chosen to visit Abigail for the first time after that day.
Hannibal had visited her quite regularly, much to Alana's chagrin who was entrusted with her care.

"What do you get out of it?"

"Is it important that an action must always be performed in the wake of expectations?"

"Action in itself implies intent."

"Yes. I only intended to be there for her, should she finds herself in need of anything upon waking."

"Why?"

"I...I feel responsible for what happened to her. I feel that it is right to be there for her, in whatever capacity I can be, or she allows me."

"But you had nothing to do with whatever happened! I killed Hobbes!"

"Yes. And yet I feel just as responsible for what happened to poor Abigail just as much as you do."

“That’s- it’s not fair.”

“No, it’s not. Not to each of us. But what we can do is be there for each other.”

Will had visited Abigail twice in the home after she woke up. He always lost his nerve when the caretaker would ask him to wait since Abigail was never around the time he visited.

On his third try, however, Alana was there and she encouraged Will to talk to Abigail.

“She is curious about you.”

Will was surprised. He honestly didn’t think Abigail would even want to have anything to do with him.
“I think Hannibal is to be blamed for that. From what she has left unsaid, it seems that you’re the favourite topic for them to bond over.”

Now, Will was even more surprised.

“She likes Dr Lecter?”

Alana thought for a moment before quipping, “She does appear to be more animated when talking to him than she ever is with me.”

And that had only added to his growing anxiety about meeting her in person.

But then that choice was taken away from him when he quite literally walked into her in a small greenhouse, when she was crouching down to tend to some plants.

“I’ll leave you two to it. I hope you’d like some green tea.”

They were suspended in silence. Abigail never looked up from her work and Will was too aware to pay any attention to the lovely flowers blooming around them.

But then Will began to articulate his awry thoughts and was promptly cut off by Abigail as she stood up, fixing him with her clear blue eyes, surrounded by a lush brown hair. Her

cheeks were pale, blotchy with pink, and a certain kind of scarf wrapped snugly around her neck. Though it wasn't that cold.

A kind of scarf that somehow spoke of Hannibal's choice.

"I didn't want to see you the first two times you came."

Will knew, but he said nothing.

She stared at him some more, her gaze inquisitive. As if Will were a puzzle she was trying to figure out.

"I didn't think you'd have the balls to actually come around the third time. Alana said you're shy. And you're feeling guilty."

Will blinked at her.

She looked embarrassed, and for a moment Will was reminded that she was just a couple of years younger than him...was still a child in many ways. A victim to the sordid crimes of her own father.
She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, looking down and then away. She walked up to a bench and sat. Will only a few meters away.

"I'm...sorry. Hannibal says I am rude when I'm scared."

"Hannibal said the same thing about me." Abigail's face perked up, only a little, but Will continued, driving his hands deep inside his pockets. "Am I scaring you?"

She let out a juvenile snort and Will felt the ice between them melt.

"You're not very scary- I'm sorry- but, no. That's not why I'm scared. I'm scared because my whole life has been turned topsy-turvy, my father is- was a psychopathic serial killer who wanted to kill me, my mom's dead, I can never go back to my old life ever again...I'm completely desolate."

"I know..."

“You don’t!” She replied with fire in her eyes. “You all just say sweet words, make me throw back your words at you so that you can all contend yourselves with thinking you’ve helped a poor, lost girl! But you’ll never understand what it’s like to lose everything before you’ve even blinked! To feel scared of even admitting to loving the person who’d always been so good to you out loud because they were a monster! I have to stay *here*, with these- these really sick people who are *so slow and boring and nothing ever happens and I’m the most active when I’m digging out carrots and potatoes.* This is not the life I wanted. I should *hate* you for doing it to me. For killing my dad. But i don’t . I don’t hate you because you saved *me* too.”

Her eyes were moist. Her voice cracked. She closed her eyes, no doubt willing everything to be just a void if darkness. And that the next time she’d open them she’d find that she was just asleep. And everything was fine. Will knew.

“It’s not your fault you survived your father, Abigail.”

She glanced up at Will startled.

“You survived him because you deserved it. Because you were stronger than whatever your father was and wanted from you. It’s okay to feel like it’s unfair. But it’s not wrong. Because you lived, you won.”

Abigail stared at Will as if she found a piece she had been looking for. She gave a small smile, Will’s heart crumbled on seeing that, and she whispered, “Hannibal told me the same thing.”

Will didn’t know what to say so he didn’t. After a while, Abigail spoke. “Will you tell me something.”

“Sure.”

“What was it like...killing my dad?”

The ghost of Garrett Jacob Hobbes had so far only existed in that abstract realm in his periphery of non-acknowledgement. He was always whispering those same words, over and over again. But it was then that Will could see him. Perfectly bloody, morbidly alive. A caricature of himself in death, looming behind Abigail with his disgusting hands over her shoulders.

“It...was something that I never wished to experience again. It was a harrowing experience...like the worst kind of tar that sticks to you and refuses to come off, even if you scrub your skin off.”

Abigail’s eyes grew wide, her mouth parted. “Even if it’s a bad person?”

Hannibal’s impassive gaze steadying Will as he struggled to find the correct answer to what he had asked. “Did killing Garrett Jacob Hobbes feel good because doing bad things to bad people feels good?”

“It’s the most abhorrent feeling in the entire world,” he lied as the faces of Hobbes and Hannibal’s melted into each other grotesquely.

“When can she relocate to somewhere else?”

They were sitting in the front lawn, Abigail had gone back to her room after she came down to greet them.

“There are still some legal procedures left. The victims’ families are being compensated by various assets and liquidating all that Hobbes had left for Abigail, which isn’t much really. There’s been an issue with selling their cabin though. Jack wants to hold onto that place for as long as he can. They are combing through the entire thing, the woods at the back. Abigail hasn’t been very forthcoming about her extended families. It’s quite literally a mess.”

“Why does Jack want to hold on to the cabin?”

“I don’t know much. Jack only tells me what I need to know and Abigail is...very secretive about what she used to do there with her father. Which is quite understandable...if it weren’t for the fact that she seemed very adept at manipulation.”

Will frowned. “She’s sixteen.”

“That doesn’t explain how she can manage to play up her weaknesses in order to enshroud the mystery of her life with Garrett Jacob Hobbes, Will.” She sighed, drinking from her

earthen cup. “I’m just as much on her side as you are. I want to see her free and well. But for that to happen, Abigail must clear her name from all the other possibilities which could hold her culpable by either inaction or participation. But she is unwilling to give me anything concrete with which I can work. Hannibal has tried but I think he’s too taken by the facade she puts up for everyone. I was hoping you could help me here.”

“You think she has something to do with the Shrike killings. Alana -"

“It’s a possibility we can’t rule out just yet.”

“I’ll talk to Jack.”

“Will,”

“No Alana. She has gone through hell and back. I’ve talked to her and I don’t think that she even saw beyond the mask her father put up. She’s devastated.”

“I’m not denying that she isn’t Will. But you’ve only talked to her for what, three days counting today? Is that enough to prove something or the other? Her devastation might be true but the situations leading up to that? They’re still ambiguous.”

Will gritted his teeth. “Jack allows me into his cases because I can help with those ambiguities. I’ve seen Abigail. She’s not a murderer.”

“Will you don’t-" he stormed out of the building. He’d apologise to Alana later, but he needed to talk to Jack.

Jack was conveniently in his office when Will walked in.

The man was sorting out paperwork and didn’t look at Will apart from barking, “You use your hands on the door before using your legs Graham.”

“Why is Abigail being considered a suspect and not a victim? I thought the investigators had ruled her our as a suspect or an accomplice.”

Jack didn't stop his scribbling though he let out a loud exhale. "It's a common protocol Will. I hope you haven't forgotten that in the interim."

"I was there. When Garrett Jacob Hobbes tried to kill Abigail I was there. And I've talked to her after now. She's not an accomplice."

"We still haven't found evidence stating the contrary Will."

"Abigail is a victim of her father! She didn't know what he was capable of when he claimed that he loved her more than the world. The price that Hobbes laid down on her feet wasn't something she wanted."
Jack then looked up from his papers. He levelled his gaze at Will and then pursed his lips. "First. You don't talk to me like that. Second. *You* don't talk to *me* like that."

Will, much to his chagrin, was feeling properly chided. He opened his mouth to barging in on Jack like that but Jack shot him down with a quick 'sit your ass down' and Will obliged.

"This is standard procedure Will. Just because you're emotionally involved with the victim doesn't absolve them from any and all crimes. Abigail' alibis have checked out, yes. She did not have any prior connections to any of the Shrike's victims, yes. But there is one thing that we can't yet rule out. She does have a completely reasonable motive to either assist or act as a bait for her father. Survivors of abusers have adopted certain traits from their abusers in order to survive, it's not unnatural. The crime scene is once again being checked for any evidence which might lead us to know the whereabouts of the bodies of his victims. Do you understand Will?"

"Yes. I do."

"You know that DNA from all the girls have been found in their hunting cabin. Where Abigail reportedly admitted going on hunt with her father."

Will didn't say anything. Logically, Jack was right. It was standard procedure, and what Will suggested very easily could've hindered their work. Will was surprised by his own selfishness for a relative stranger. There were families out there who still didn't know what Hobbes had done to their bodies. Was it possible for a single person to consume eight girls in over 19 months? Will didn't know what else he could've been doing with all that rotting flesh and bones.

"Didn't I tell you to take a month off? What are you doing back in my office Graham? I'm

still drowning in paperwork. With additional ones that I have to fill out to explain how Hobbes died. The Director is already breathing down my neck. You don't show your face to me before three weeks of your official rest are off. Clear?"

"Yes, Jack."

He gestured with his hand as to ask what he was still doing here and Will reluctantly removed himself from the chair, a bit embarrassed. Before he walked out of Jack's office he stopped him.

"Will,"

"Yeah?"

"People do strange things for the sake of love. Hobbes killed those girls so that he didn't have to kill Abigail. One-sided obsessions like this is dangerous. But what if it weren't one sided? When does the line between survival and participation blur?"

Will didn't know the answer.

It was the question of Abigail's innocence that had introduced a sort of tension between him and Jack. But to him her innocence had always been unquestionable. Abigail was just as much a victim of her father as the other girls were that he killed in her name. Each of their names a weight put on her shoulder, something she was always to carry with herself. A permanent gift Garett Jacob Hobbes had left her with.

Will could empathize with that. Maybe even more so than anyone else – because wasn't that how Will was left to feel whenever his father would come, bruised and bloody, giving him a smile he thought was cheerful before he disappeared into the washroom? Every ruptured skin on the bones of his face, every fine capillaries that burst into blotches a horrid mixture of red blue and purple that were sprinkled across his bony back, every swollen fingers mottled blue and green and every limp that he tried to hide felt like brands that Will could only pant through alone, shivering inside his blanket when his father was passed out from pain and ember. Working as a hand-for-hire for Verger was both a boon and a curse. Most of the nights though, Will was comforted by the fact that they could pay off the debts his father owed, but

then there were those long nights when Will would keep Jack's number close to him because his father had that look in his eyes that said he might not return.

Such funny things, memories were.

Even now when Will thought back on those days, he remembered his father more softer around the edges, his alcohol induced babbling which were once disconcerting now had a fondness to them that Will never remembered thinking them as.

The most striking thing, however, was how his memories of Hannibal had never changed over the years. He was, and had remained an idea of a person that Will was at first cautious of and then curious about. The man had always been an extension of his well-chosen, finely articulated and meticulous presentation. Of course Will could see through the act, the play that Hannibal scripted, directed and watched : am artist and audience all by himself.Had seen him drink in the mirth when people around him behaved just as he wanted them to.

But Will could never really see through to the other side of the gossamer veil. That Hannibal wasn't a very black and white man was evident from the constitution he had, but he had never really thought of Hannibal as anything other than what he was to him – a man he could depend on. Even when Will's emotions for the man grew complex and changed over the time, his correspondence to him remained the same. Hannibal was still very much an idea of everything Hannibal wanted Will to think he was. As he learnt to see beneath the gestures Hannibal would make carelessly as anything but, Will wondered now if it changed anything at all. Knowing that the man had manipulated Will from the very moment he stepped into Will's life, that the dependence he shared with him would be something Alana would frown upon if she knew, that Hannibal could very possibly be a *very bad man*- change anything?

Will drew a sharp breath.

He could hear his blood rushing inside his ears which was only broken intermittently by the loud snores of Winston who kept his head on Will's lap. He couldn't deny that his heart thudded against his chest at the thought. Will bit his lip, took a long drag of his cigarette and – just because he could do it, just because he felt curious about what would happen- put it off by rubbing it on the pink-ivory wood table across from him. A dark circular stain now adorned the table. Winston huffed for the trouble and Will soothed him with his fingers scratching him under his snout.

Will wanted to know the man behind the idea.

He wanted to peel - no- ***eat*** into the layers of identities that Hannibal performed, he wanted to gnaw down to the marrow of each of their aspects, to taste every individual thoughts, every singular fascinations Hannibal had ever had, to see him now for the man he truly was.

As the main door clicked open the footfall of a measured cadence was followed by the soft clicks of the door closing. Will closed his eyes; afraid Hannibal could see his naked anticipation.

The footsteps stopped just outside of the threshold of the living space and Hannibal saw Will sprawled languidly on the ottoman with the pale smell of smoke hanging heavily in the air, and a sleepy Winston completing the visage. Because Will knew the way he was laid out, the sinewy stretch of his neck deliberately cradled by one of his arms, the loose blue t- shirt two sizes too big on him, the cloth almost falling away at Will's right shoulder, his taunt skin pulled over the supple curve of his collar bone and with one of his legs prepped against a small table in front of him while the other was carelessly folded beneath him - will knew of Hannibal's sensibilities. He knew the lines and curves and edges that the man would drink in with his eyes, making Will feel the weight and sweet burn of his unyielding gaze, never oppressive but always welcoming. *Enthralling*. Will could still feel the dampness sticking to his skin after the shower. The bite of the cold outside was almost negligible inside Hannibal's home but he still had goose bumps breaking out all over his body. The way Hannibal's eyes drank in Will was a physical sensation beyond the reaches of words. He was thankful for Winston, Will didn't want to show every card yet.

"Will, good evening." If his voice sounded a little out of breath was left unsaid. Will opened his eyes and smiled at the immaculate man.

"Hannibal. How do you feel about a date?"

Chapter End Notes

Next up÷÷÷÷
Will meets daddies, jack loses his shit, hanni has a lot of fun and anthony is up to no good.

Ps...I'll have it posted before the end of the month, hopefully!!!
Thank you for reading 🌸

Chapter Ten

Chapter Notes

I'm learning that keeping promises is hard...so I'm going to be more careful from now on 🙇‍♀️

But on the other hand, HELLO MY BEAUTIFUL READERS!!!! I hope the year has started with good tidings🌸🌸🌸

Just a warning, there are going to be some very disturbing images, graphic depictions of dead bodies, death and all bad things in general. Please pay head to the tags and take care of yourself.💗💗💗

And, lastly I'm pulling everything outta my uneducated and lazy ass. I'm sure things in real life aren't like the way I'm writing and maybe it doesn't rain as much in Baltimore as I'm writing here but it's kinda symbolic and it's fiction so pardon all my mistakes if you will.

Have a great reading!!!!

It was a bleak autumn morning of cutting teeth on rusted spoon to scrape off the last vestiges of a meal that never reached his aching stomach when a curious spark crashed through his nerves, his fingers spasming on the chipped bowl he was holding and sending it clattering on the old floor. He ignored the snickers and the vile remarks, ignored the haze of anger that clouded his vision momentarily upon seeing his only meal of the day splattered on the floor that had already attracted few of the snivelling and pathetic worms who weren't going to last the week. He ignored his own confusion to better understand the peculiar rush of warmth, something so foreign and threatening that he had gone stiff, visibly so. He scolded himself for reacting so strongly, for allowing himself to be seen so rattled.

Standing up, he left the hall and walked through the corridor. He knew they were on his heels. He could smell their rotting anticipation and sugary thick excitement dripping disgustingly in the air. They knew he knew.

But Hannibal walked, measuredly.

The spark had set his nerves at a buzz that was burning in a way when sunlight washed your face when you stared at it on a cold winter afternoon. He savoured that feeling, curious about how its absence had been largely aloof in Hannibal's mind until he was reminded of its electric sharpness and a bearable heat that didn't make him want to claw his skin and bleach his bones.

He had only few precious moments before they pounced on him, hungry, depraved savages tearing into him thinking he was weak now that he had shown it so clearly to everyone. They were all ravenous here, in this orphanage that even satan might have forsaken. Hannibal had slowly starved himself, had let the bite of this immeasurable pain increase by increment, to surpass even the death-like ache of that month when he lost everything. He cultured it, nurtured it, fed it any and all of his waking thoughts and sleepless sighs until it became an imago of his own crafting. And through his patient rigours, he remembered that spontaneous spark. Remembered how it brought every single cell inside of him to life in a way bathing in their blood and flesh failed to bring. He longed to taste that spark, to hold it under his teeth and test its ripeness.

Seeing Will curled around the dog , so close and within his reach but a chasm of things left unsaid drifting them so far away from one another. Hannibal thought back to the way he had hungered for that spark and even after finding Will, had not allowed himself to bridge the distance but always kept him within his ambit so sure in his gentle prodding.

Hannibal imagined that his hands mapped out the expanse of the pale and soft skin hidden under the layers, he imagined memorizing every little moles, every single scars – to hold him so close to him that their bodies forget that they were different people. The thought of it was so intense, so passionate that his iron control over the bond loosened only slightly and felt it pulsing between them. Will was stubborn, something Hannibal both admired and was irked by. Will remained unmoving and Hannibal didn't want to encroach any further.

He left the room with a heaviness that settled uncomfortably within him.

He knew that they had to talk, leaving things as they were between them would only embitter Will and drive him further from Hannibal, something he would not allow. Anthony had always been a wildcard, his unpredictability and boldness had endeared him for a moment, but that was well spent and expired. Thought his personal use of Anthony had run its course, the man's persistence was useful in other ways and Hannibal had assumed his sense of self preservation would prevail over his grandiose sense of self assuredness. But it seemed he was more of a fool than Hannibal imagined him to be. A waste, really, Anthony could have served some higher purpose though he was curious to see what tipped him over the edge. After all, he had willingly walked into the maw of the beast knowing what was promised to him if he should ever cross his path again.

“I’m surprised that you hadn’t progressed to skulls and organs as decorative pieces for your table Hannibal. It would have sufficed as ostentatious enough without treading the line of blatant self-aggrandisement for you.”

Anthony shot his winning smile, his pointed incisors pressing into his lips in the way he knew Hannibal had liked but it lost some of its momentum when he saw the man returning his smile with a pleasant one of his, cool and professional holding his gaze while simultaneously making him feel that he was insignificant. Anthony didn’t let himself mind, despite of his stray fantasies he wasn’t here for fornication after all. He had a message to deliver and after that, he was going to disappear. Permanently this time. He knew what a fine line he walked when it came to Hannibal’s whimsical little toy. Sure he had envied that someone else was the one who got to be Hannibal’s favourite toy but then he had seen first hand what the man was capable of outside of the bed and his suits.

Swallowing around the dry spell in his throat, Anthony took the seat Hannibal pulled for him, conscious about the expensive spices that threatened to make his mind woolly as Hannibal set the plates. His eyes tracked the deft hands as they moved. The spice of his cologne made it impossible to focus on the array of things that were pointed and sharp. Even the foliage that Hannibal had chosen to display on the table were malicious and garish. Anthony didn’t feel welcome even with Tchaikovsky playing at the background. If anything, everything in this dining room made him skittish and feel on edge. Hannibal’s dismissive disposition coupled with an articulated tranquillity only made him more dangerous. Because Anthony might not know who the man was, but he knew him well enough in bed to know just how intense and proprietary he was when it came to his favourite toy. Anthony did spend most of his time grooming himself as best he could, it didn’t escape him that he resembled dear William, that moniker drowned in the throes of pleasure as the man cupped the back of his tousled head and demanded that he closed his eyes, knowing how his eyelashes cast a shadow over his blotched pale skin.

He must have looked like how he imagined Will would be if it was him that had his tongue wrapped so snug around Hannibal.

Maybe Anthony ought not have been so hostile to Will from the beginning. But he believed in his resourcefulness. Hannibal was smart and anyhow, he wasn’t a man to be carried away by his emotions. He would see reason.

Anthony smiled graciously as Hannibal disappeared into his kitchen. His eyes trailed back to the assortment of forks and knives. His fingers twitched on his lap but he washed his nerves down with a copious gulp of chardonnay. The man walked in artfully balancing the dishes

that steamed and smelled heavenly. He put down the dishes one by one, serving first Anthony with what looked like –

“Are you feeding me a tongue?”

A small quirk of his lips gave his amusement away as he served his own plate and then took his seat at the table.

“Pot au feu with roast lamb rump and cockles. I remember you loving lambs. I hope your taste hasn’t changed drastically over the years.”

Anthony masked his nervous snort with a careless chuckle. “I do love lambs. But usually the alive kind.”

Hannibal picked his fork and knife, cutting into the thick slices of the offal that gave away easily under the barest pressure. Anthony watched him dip the meat in the dark sauce before he put it inside his mouth, chewing deliberately all the while looking as if he were performing a high form of art. And he couldn’t deny the man had magic in his movements.

Anthony shifted in his seat and picked up his own cutlery.

“You won’t eat?”

Anthony gulped. “Of course I will. I wouldn’t dare to be rude.”

“Good boy.”

Now that he had ate a tongue, God knows to whom it belonged, Anthony thought that he was going to take a long break from meat for a while.

“It’s delicious as always Hannibal. Thank you for inviting me to your table again.”

“You are welcome Anthony. How was Paris?”

“Beautiful and cold. It lost its allure after three months of labouring under Dr Fell. I could almost see the reason why you choose to eat the rude, they are incorrigible otherwise.”

“The world is better a place without those who lack decency. Whenever feasible, one must

always eat the rude. Did Dr Fell fall a prey to your machinations and was eaten?"

Anthony gave a lazy grin. "It turns out he isn't as straight as a pasta. Not that I bemoan the fact, I had heard that he smelled distinctly of garlic and he wasn't that special in bed anyways. More into wild cougars than hard pecs. But no, I didn't have to do much for his downfall. He brought it to himself all on his own."

"Pity, you were so hopeful about him after what happened at the Vergers."

The chardonnay pebbled inside his throat and he had to fight to stop himself from coughing.

Was he too late then? But how on earth could he have known before hand? No one knew, not even that frigid bitch and who knew how many private eyes she had all around the world tracking every move the pawns of Mason made.

"You know Hannibal, I am sure that I've fucked the entire white collared society of gentlemen that Paris could offer. And yet I still come to imagining you pounding so deep inside of me that I can feel every throb of it in my stomach. I am hard now."

Hannibal held his gaze. "I know."

Anthony leaned forward on his elbow unable to resist, reminding himself that he was just testing the water. He had no intention of drowning. But a little wouldn't hurt. He just wanted a little something to remember this by, the last evening spend with Hannibal Lecter.

"Do you smell it in the air? How does it smell exactly? Is it different than what *dear William* smells of?"

Hannibal finished everything in his plate and Anthony waited in silence because that was what Hannibal expected from him. After Hannibal dabbed the rich fabric of the cloth napkin against his lips and had neatly folded it, he fixed Anthony with a dark look that immediately alerted all the red flags inside his head. He might have also been drooling a bit.

"What did you tell them Anthony?"

He didn't pretend he didn't know what he was talking about. His fingers tapped out an uneven beat on the table, Anthony unable to take his eyes off of him even though everything told him to *run*.

“Just enough to make it possible for me to come here and warn you about them. About what they want.”

Hannibal tilted his head, his eyes deceptively calm.
“A messenger? Tsk-tsk, I’d have imagined you to be smarter than that Anthony.”

He gritted his teeth. “YOU HAVE-" Anthony breathed through his nose. He wasn’t going to think about it. He wasn’t. “You have no idea what they did to me. Cordell and his goons are for blood. Your blood to be exact. They don’t know what you did to Mason and after they made sure that I didn’t know it as well they let me go with only one thing that Cordell has asked me to personally convey to you.” He cleared his voice and raised a brow in amusement he wasn’t feeling and said, “I would like to have you for dinner Dr Lecter. I’m looking forward to the day we meet, and rest assured – it will be a day you won’t forget.”

He knew that Hannibal hadn’t missed the way his legs started trembling or the look of absolute panic that he tried to subdue with a lazy smirk. Hannibal watched him in a way that reminded him of his uncle and how he’d look at the lambs in his ranch just before he rounded them up for slaughter for the day’s work. And yet, yet it was undeniable how the magnetism that Hannibal exuded pinned him to the seat awaiting his doom.

“I think I shall die of anticipation. “ Hannibal commented at last, taking a candid sip from his drink and smiling pleasantly at Anthony. The hair on the back of his neck stood on ends.

“But this is not all that you were told. And you, dear Anthony, are not telling me everything.”

“I can’t. They...made sure that I only tell you what they want you to hear. And as I told you, I’ve only said that which was needed to be said. And you know me Hannibal. I might be a scoundrel but I’m not a back-stabber. I would never betray you. And I tell this to you with genuine concern. That Cordell- he is made of vile things. He’s pure evil, it I’ve ever seen one. I don’t know why he is hunting you but that guy has connections and he isn’t afraid to use them. I came to warn you and now that is done I’m going to take my leave.”

He stood up slowly, watching Hannibal for any sudden movement but the man remained poised in his seat, drinking leisurely from his glass. Feeling unsettled Anthony cracked a grin and walked towards the coat hanger.

“The meal was truly exciting Hannibal. It was a pleasant evening, albeit a sad one. I hate to leave you so soo-"

An explosion of pain at the back of his head and then everything went dark.

"Of course Will. Whatever you want. However, I thought that you were cross with me."

The smile dropped from Will' face. Will was feeling petulant enough, and as he watched Hannibal's eyes finding the circular stain on the pricy wood Will just didn't care if he came close to throwing tantrums.

"Funny how I thought that you actually wanted me as your soulmate."

Hannibal easily caught Will in his vaguely amused gaze and took a step but stopped at the glare that Will threw his way.

"Will. I know that I've been unfair to you and very callous regarding certain aspects of our shared lives. And while I understand that I can not take away the things I've done or said that has hurt you, I want to ask you to believe me when I say that there is no love lost between Anthony and myself."

Will snorted. "It's not about Anthony." Will paused. "It's not just about him. I don't care what he has to say to you or you to him. I want to have a real conversation, like real people do. Together. I want to get to know you, figure out the things you like, the songs you just play for noise and those that you genuinely love. I want to know what makes you laugh out loud, what irritates you the most. I want to know every silly story you have and all the times that you messed up. I want to take you to dinners, to lunches, to the movies. Do mundane, boring, usual people stuff with you. You say that I am important to you, I want to see that. Don't you find it funny how we lived together for almost five years and I don't even have an inside joke with you!"

If only Will knew the extent to which Hannibal was willing to go, that all of those things that he so naively wanted to know were all related to him. Sometimes it startled Hannibal how much another human being had come to be so important to him. There were rarely any limits that Hannibal was unwilling to cross for Will. And should Will have even the barest of understanding of the depth that Hannibal's interest ran for him, he'd surely be terrified of Hannibal. Terrified of the importance that Will demanded without asking.

“I am willing to do anything that you ask of me Will.”
Will stopped at that. He knew, his cunning boy, that Hannibal didn’t speak these words lightly. Their heaviness hung in the air between them, Will unable to tear his eyes away from Hannibal and Hannibal was content to enjoy the open awe and disbelief that shone in his soul mate’s face. The thought that Hannibal had meant everything that he had ever said, that he was going to do anything that Will asked him to do was so unbelievable a concept that it ached Hannibal a little, to think how touch starved and malnourished of love and care he had been all his life. And Hannibal had increased that feeling of loneliness within him while he provided him with every material thing he needed for comfort. Allowing the distance to grow was a necessary step into seeing what his soulmate was capable of. But now, the time had come to finally allow themselves the intimacy they had been wanting.

Will was a little out of breath. His cold-bitten lips were red and luscious, his eyes wide and such a startling shade of blue-green through the glasses as he stared at Hannibal that it urged an echoing response in Hannibal. He wanted to hold Will, he wanted to kiss him until they were short of passing out. He wanted to see his hands imprinted on the pearlescent skin, wanted to see that long stretch of neck red and bruised. He wanted to feel those long fingers in his hair, around his throat and on his back. He wanted in a way that left Hannibal feeling dissonant. His emotions were amplified when it came to Will. His feelings for Will were becoming an inconvenience for his master plans.

Curiouser and curiouser.

“I’d never ask something you couldn’t give.” He finally said, his voice sounding a little shaky.

Hannibal eased Will’s nerves with a smile that showed his fangs.

“And that is why I gave you that power dear Will. You need not be hesitant. Where and when do you want us to go?”

Will blinked, being caught unaware. Evidently, he hadn’t really planned that far. Hannibal found it endearing.

“Uh. I haven’t really – I’ll think of a place where we could go. But it needs to happen after two days because I’m going to conduct an unofficial interview with the victim’s parents. So if you’re still free by then we could do it. The date, I meant the date.”

His Will was positively red in the ears by now.

“I am available for you anytime you so wish Will. Only let me know a day prior so that I can adjust my schedule accordingly. I’ve been waiting a long time to speak with you, dear Will. There are so many things that I want to share with you.” Hannibal took a step then, and on seeing Will not rebuke his advance, Hannibal approached Will until he was a mere few feet away from where Will was sat.

“This distance between us was necessary up to a point. I had never before taken sole care of another person and the idea of having a soulmate...was difficult for me to come to terms with. Not because I despised the idea of it, but because I could never imagine myself to be so invested in another person’s life so much that all lines between our beings cease to exist. In the olden myths, a variation of the bond soulmates share and its mystifying powers could be found regardless of time, of place, of cultures. They all believe that the bond of a soulmate is the most invasive, the most personal and intimate a sensation one can ever feel without being physically fused to each other. The prospect of someone being so important, so essential, so conjoined; the opportunity to experience a person through my raw emotions alone, the abstract absolute potency of it was...terrifying.”

Will listened with a singular focus, his eyes reflecting the magnitude of such an ordeal shared and felt.
Hannibal waited for his cue. He let Will soak up those words and digest their implications. He let Will to grab onto his frayed confidence and rewarded him with a smile when he did, and tilted his chin upwards. Even though it was Will who looked up at him with unashamed longing that Hannibal knew would mirror his own, it was Hannibal himself who felt that the long and deep pain he had been feeling in his bones over the cloud that darkened over them was finally dissolving. Hannibal felt a lightness in his chest, a blooming heat that settled comfortably at the bottom of his stomach as his fingers reached out to touch Will’s cheek. The prickly sensation of the younger man’s growing stubble was something more sensual than Hannibal had ever experienced. Even the sound of Will’s exhale felt like it was novel. Were interactions between soulmates supposed to be this intense? This all-consuming saturation of happiness?

Hannibal’s thumb pressed along Will’s cheekbone, up towards the silken softness under his eye and then down towards the hollow of his cheek where his dimple would appear when he’d smile.

Arjun had fought and won wars with his utmost belief in the gospel of his soulmate Krsna and had set an example for an enduring and transcending bond of companionship and love. Achilles had vowed vengeance in the name of Patroclus and had kept it through his own blood. Such tales of strong interpersonal bonds that transcend mortality, divinity and becomes encrusted with immortality in time and in stories. Such power...and all cradled in this fragile thing called ‘love'.

“Hannibal,” Will began.

“Will you kiss me?”

His thumb pressed into the corner of his lips barely skirting the edge.

“Do you want me to?”

Will's lashes casted a shadow over his cheeks as they fluttered, Hannibal watching him swallow.
“Yes.” Will whispered, his hand coming up to encircle Hannibal’s wrist. “Kiss me, Hannibal.”

Hannibal had imagined this moment in many ways, had constructed circumstances in his mind which might lead to this shared moment intimacy when they’d finally acknowledge their potential. And every single imagination had been just as fantastical and intense just as they were plausible. And in every one of those, he'd imagine every microcosm of expression that’d fleet across his Will’s face. Every minute twitch of his brows, if his eyes would blow wide or shut themselves close, every soft exhale or aborted intake of his breaths; he had imagined them on ends and he was glad to experience that none of them could hold the light up to the moment as it did come to pass.

Hannibal willingly went to his knees not minding the thick carpet underneath him. His hand loosely grasped the back of Will’s head, remaining immobile but pliant wanting Will to take it from here, wanting Will to take what he needed from him.

And Will didn’t disappoint.

Needy arms snaked around Hannibal, one carding through his silken ashen blonde hair and tugging him down while the other laced around his broad shoulder. Hannibal only had a brief moment to appreciate the fierceness, the absolute wild want that shone darkly in Will’s eyes before he was lost in the tide that was Will’s crashing passion.

Because that was what it was. Will was the calm that unfurled itself into a white raging enigma that could sweep away everything in its path, breaking and remaking as he went; magnificent and unfathomable.

Unpredictable.

Will kissed him like he was drowning and Hannibal was the fractured light in the depth of the ocean that offered relief. Will kissed him like Hannibal was the only person whom he had touched, hungry and starving and demanding. And Hannibal unfolded. He let himself be explored by Will's wanting tongue, by his searching teeth. His hands were everywhere, scratching and tugging and holding tightly. Will's glasses had gone askew over the bridge of his nose. It was awkwardly stuck between them but neither gave it a care, each too invested in their kiss to give it a single precious thought. Winston, who resolutely remained asleep in Will's lap only expressed a huff of displeasure but otherwise didn't move. And Hannibal found himself to be inordinately drawn by this aspect of their shared life. Not only did he crave an intimacy that was smouldering and all-encompassing, but this hint of domesticity that Hannibal had always been averse to had now become just as alluring to him as the idea of seeing Will in his true potential.

They parted when their lungs burned, their fingers clasping each other holding each other close. Will's eyes were closed, his lips as red as a cherry. The bond flared and pulsed between them, alive and joyous. Hannibal couldn't take his eyes off of the man before him. He was a divine sight, here on his couch, in his house, in his old shirt that Will had taken a couple of years ago. There were so many stray shirts that Will had decided to call them his, and only ever after Hannibal had worn them once or twice. Hannibal had found it endearing then. But now, a deeply reserved part of him that abound in boundless patience found Will delectable. Almost too good to not be eaten up. And even though Hannibal would not be averse to splay Will out and honour him in every and all ways he deserved to, but they still needed to take this one step at a time. Will was a vintage that ought to be experienced and consumed a morsel at a time. No need to rush fine things.

Hannibal smiled softly at him, his fingers reaching out to touch those messy hair that curled haphazardly atop his head. Will leaned into the touch, finally opening his eyes.

"You're bleeding," he murmured.

Hannibal tasted the blood that welled up from the split opened skin on his upper lip. Will followed the motion of his tongue and swallowed.

"We were a little intense, yes. Although it is quite understanding. It was our first time."

Will looked at Hannibal for a moment. He kept his face straight, only his fingers moving slowly through Will's hair.

Before long Will broke out into a fit of giggles that was so infectious that Hannibal found himself chuckling. Winston did raise his head then, looking weary and affronted and

quizzical all at the same time. Hearing them laugh had made Winston curious about what it was that set them on and his tail started to thump against the bed of the couch.

“God! That was terrible. I can’t believe it that you just said that. My glasses are all fogged. “ Will went on, taking off his glasses and looking at them grinning year-to-year. He affectionately patted Winston on his head who got even more excited. Hannibal reciprocated the curious nudging of Winston’s nose against his hand that was on Will’s lap by scratching him behind his ears, something he had seen Will doing several times that evidently Winston loved.

“You know, it’s the first time Winston has both of us loving him at the same time. Because don’t pretend as if I haven’t seen you feeding him those rather large chunks of uncooked meat while you made food.”

“He has learnt the ‘puppy-dog eyes' very well from his father, and I’ve always been susceptible to that.”

Will rolled his eyes. “He’s nine year old man Hannibal.”

“But he doesn’t act his age,” Hannibal looked down at the excited dog who intently heard their conversation. Will laughed and cuddled Winston, showering him with many kisses and receiving a fair share of those back. Winston knew better than to pull the same trick on Hannibal and so he rewarded him with a long scratch behind the ear.

“May I help you make the dinner?”

“I’d be happy if you did.”

The scene of the crime was perfectly orchestrated.

The victims were carefully selected for the roles they had to play, their arms and legs washed and cleaned, their hair meticulously combed and folded, their stiffened limbs forever frozen into what couldn’t be called anything else than artful postures mirroring their counterparts on the picture that still hung from the galleries. Even their clothes had been selected with care.

Such minute attention to detail, so much thought and planning put into carrying out otherwise gruesome murders and then to exhibit such violence in the garb of a morbid but haunting aesthetic that replicated perfectly the Primavera astonished Beverley every time she had look at it.

She can't remember what or when she had come across the Lounds article that mentioned this case in passing but it had grabbed her attention instantaneously and she had been pinned to the case, unable to take her mind off of it. Of course that old article was no longer to be found anywhere, surely Lounds had crossed her boundaries to report something that wasn't supposed to be reported and it had to be taken down.

All the killings by the Il Monstro were elements that together came to be an art...a statement of sorts. They were all eerily accurate replica of the painting of Botticelli's Primavera. She had read one article where the reporter was so confounded as to how to describe these grisly crime scene. The fate of these victims hung over their heads like a dreadful curse : most of them were missing organs, almost all of them were alive at some point during the extracting process. Their were surgical techniques implemented to take these organs, and an almost sadistic detachment from these victims since the killer knew perfectly well where to hurt the most while still keeping them alive, the level of systematic controlled infliction of pain on those victims' bodies sent shivers down her spine.

And yet they had suddenly stopped. That crime scene seemed to be the only motive of the killer, the end-goal.

Beverley had then, by happenstance, came to attend one of the special seminars that Crawford had been conducting on recent documented cases of jane and john does around the Chesapeake Bay. And amongst the several unfortunate victims who had lost their name to death, she found three peculiar ones that caught her attention just as the Il Monstro of Florence had.

One of the victim was an unidentified male, anywhere between late 20s to mid 30s. He was found in the Harborne and Croft law firm's parking lot. His skin and flesh were gone due to decomposition and it was estimated from his cranial structure and tissue samples that he might have been caucasian. Only the upper portion of his skeletal half was intact. The left collar bone, the humor of both of his arms and floating ribs were fashioned into archaic instruments that lay scattered about him. It was also noted that those instruments were theoretically able to produce sound.

The second victim was an unidentified male of a mixed African American aged late 40s to early 50s. He was dismembered, beheaded, missing his lungs and spleen. His cause of death was determined to be his body going into shock due to blood loss. His body was literally drained of blood. His chin, wrists and ankles had been slit to presumably drain the victim of

his blood. Wires and industrial fibre ropes had then been expertly woven through each of the joints of the victim and then the body was suspended from a makeshift stage at the centre of the property. The body was fashioned after a puppet, holding his head in one hand while the other was fixed at the top holding all the ropes and wires.
The last victim was a woman who was the best preserved of the three. Her identity was possibly one of the missing persons reported in the month of July in 2011 but there were no surviving family members who could positively identify her. The facial skin had been flayed, peeled back carefully into rolls that hung from below her broken jaw bones. She was missing her heart and lungs. A group of drunk teenagers discovered her near the trail of a nearby park. There were no apparent motives, no conclusive evidence left by the killers, no witnesses. It was as if these people just plucked from the face of the earth, killed and then discarded to be found. No one knew them, no one saw them, no one saw the killer or killers.

Beverley had been drawn to the style of dedication that was put into these murders, the attention to details of these killings. They were not simply cases of people falling into the wrong hands and having bad things happened to them. The more Beverley delves deeper in this rabbit hole, the more she became sure that the killer or killers had killed these people not just because they could, but because their death was what was important. It was almost as if these people weren't humans to the perpetrator but merely vessels, objects that the killer could beat into art.

Beverley had thrown up when she had come to that conclusion. It left a very bad aftertaste when she realized that she was inadvertently dehumanizing the victims, just as the killer had wanted. Their identities didn't matter to the killer, what mattered was what he did to them.

And as much as she strived to be objective and unbiased, she couldn't get over the hunch that this was the work of a singular person. Very likely a male. And why she thought that the person who created the bloody Primavera was also responsible for these three murders was also based on a hunch. The reports that Olsen sent had forensic reports as well. The surgical scars and precision with which the killings had been carried out in Florence was of amateurish kind. Not abysmal by any means, but an experienced surgeon could easily identify the coarseness of the stitches that could only be improved with time. And the three unidentified victims found near the Chesapeake Bay were almost ten years after the Florentine murders. Apart from the unusual obsession with the need of perfection and a sense of theatricality that was inherent in the manner in which these bodies were found, Beverley had a hunch that a closer examination of the sutures on the Chesapeake victims would reveal something of import.

But was it going to be enough to link these cases with one another and then to unravel the mystery? She might as well was searching for a needle in a heap of hay in the dark and that needle might not even exist! How was she to prove the three isolated cases of the Chesapeake Bay when all they shared was the geographical location and missing organs. These were circumstantial evidence at best, desperate imaginations at worst.

Beverley took her eyes off the pictures and reports surrounding her to take a long drag of her smoke. She was having a bad neck day and she tried to turn her head left to right in order to work that stiffness out of it. Jack had finally put his foot down yesterday.

“Do you have anything that could stand the scrutiny of the court and urge them to reopen this case?”

Jack wasn’t trying to be demeaning. He just had a roughness in the way he spoke, if Beverley hadn’t been hero-worshiping him from the moment she knew she wanted to be in the FBI, she’d be shaking at the tone of his voice. But Beverley knew the man was probably knee-deep in bureaucratic bullshit and had to deal with several other things that was way above her qualifications so she tried to keep her morale up by telling Jack about the similarities in trophies the killer took and the timeline.

Jack had pinched his nose, a deep crevasse forming between his brows and Beverley’s morale had died a painless death.

“Listen Katz. I know you want to prove your worth in the rag-tag team I have assembled. But you are already here because you have mettle. Now I have had a similar feeling about those murders when they came to us. There was something oddly ostentatious about the way they were presented that spoke of a practised hand. And though we didn’t have anything that could link them with one another but there have been cases before where a number of unsolved cases would later be reclaimed by a deranged serial killer in his jail cell decades down the line. Now I’m not saying that all three of those people were killed by the same guy, because there is nothing that points to that. And what you’re trying to do, is to also link up an instance of a bizarre case in Florence that happened a decade ago and is one of the most kept-under-the-radar cases in Italy. Do you get what I’m getting at?”

“Yes Jack. I really understand that I’m fumbling in the dark right now but there’s something to think about the fact that all the victims in Florentine murders and the Chesapeake murders share similar surgical traumas and wounds, all their organs have been partially or entirely removed, there is a distinctive dehumanization that is being done in the way they are presented and if we could compare the surgical skills between the Florentine murders and this one we might see a pattern-"

“There’s nothing left to be compared Katz! The bodies have been buried or burnt. What basis would you have to request their autopsy files on? Your hunch? That’s not going to be enough. Listen Katz, I’m trying to be patient here. But I can’t have the best minds in my team wasting resources and time on establishing patterns where there might not be any.”

“But Jack I am-"

“One month Katz. You have a month to come up with a solid lead. If you fail to do so, you’re not going to mention this case again. Clear?”

“Jack just-"

“Katz.”

“Alright. I got it.”

Beverley dropped the stub in the ashtray returning to the thinnest folder of the lot that Olson had sent.
She opened it and gasped in delight. It was the list of suspects the police had drafted. The final list of suspects.

Beverley poured down the list of the names. She saw a couple of names that were mostly spoken of when the case was still hot. She paused for a moment when she came across the name of the person that was wrongfully convicted and then tried and ultimately sentenced to death. But there, in the long list of names sitting almost innocuously was a name that jumped right out of the page and startled her. She was so surprised that she read the list from the top to the bottom again, once, twice then four more times to be sure.

Count Hannibal Lecter VIII, aged 21, apprentice in the University of Florence, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery.

She immediately went through the other documents and tried to find if there was something more written about Dr Lecter. But there was no more information. It was mentioned in passing that Dr Lecter had an alibi that passed and he was subsequently ruled out as a suspect from the case very early on. But his name was included in the final register by the then lead detective Rinaldo Pazzi before being ultimately struck off the records and the police issuing a formal apology statement publically to Lecter for maligning his name.

All this seemed very weird to Beverley and she didn’t quite understand what she was feeling. It might be just a coincidence, and the Florentine police had been inept in handling this case before so it was not strange that they suspected Dr Lecter for the case but then the question arise, why was only him and not anyone else suspected of the crimes? Why did Pazzi insist on keeping Lecter’s name? Was their some private beef between the two?

There was something so off about this whole case that set off bells ringing inside her head that didn't bode well. While Beverley contemplated telling this to Jack, she send a quick text to Will to see if he was free for a conversation.

"Thank you for your time Mr Stones. And once again, I'm very sorry for your loss."

Will tried to not let his fatigue show on his face. It was a long day of tip-toeing around the victims' parents and questioning them without having them breaking out into tears or anger – something which was a lot trickier than Will had anticipated.
He tried not be affected by the apparent disdain, confusion and mistrust on their faces when they saw Will. He'd admit that he wasn't at his best appearance. He had managed to comb down his unruly hair but they were plastered to his head. He was sweating more than he usually did, the weather had been humid but he was feeling slightly feverish. His stubble was almost becoming a scruff and Will didn't mind really. He knew he was young, and was cursed with an even more younger face. The parents were understandably disappointed to see that they were called all the way out here to be questioned by someone so young. But Will did his best to amp up his social skills and mainly stick to the list of questions that Alana had made for him in accordance with the things Will told her. He had been blessed having such a great soul in his life.

The next father to come was a Mr. Reeds. It was his house that Nathaniel was having a sleepover. Mr Reeds had a son of the same age as Nathaniel. Ted Reeds.

Mr Reeds was a lanky man, broad shoulder and square jaw. He smiled at Will before quickly looking away. He sat in seat right across him, his knees were too long for the small space in the interview table. His leg jerked once before he quit and then folded his arms in front of his chest.

"Mr Reeds, my name is special agent Will Graham. I hope you're doing fine."

"Yes, I am. As fine as one can be in the given circumstance. And I know of you before. I've known of you Mr Will Graham."

Will avoided looking at the two-way mirror, knowing very well that Jack was frowning just

as he was.
“Oh?”

“Yes,” Reeds smiled. “I am an avid reader of the Tattle Crime.”

“Ah. I see. Well, I’m sure you’ve been informed why you have been called here.”

“Oh yes! Nathaniel, poor boy. What a poor, poor boy.” Holden's voice cracked. He looked genuinely upset and Will made a note of that in his head.

“Can you walk me through the day before Nathaniel’s murder?”

“Yes, yes. It was a Saturday. I had taken that day off from work because I wasn’t feeling well. My wife told me that Pete's friend was coming over to stay the night. I was a bit unsure. The kids had just recently gone through a troubling few months, I didn’t understand why Nathaniel’s parents would allow him to get out of the home. I was very worried about Ted. I had to inform the school that Ted was going to take a week off. He needed to feel safe. But the wife said I was being too paranoid. So I let her do what she thought best. Ted was finally smiling, so I guess I was alright. They were a bunch of happy kids. They were very loud, I remember that. Laughing and playing. Ted didn’t have friends over the house a lot. It was a novel experience for him. I wanted him to have good memories that would last. Good memories that would, you know, be stronger than the other memories. They had dinner. I gave the boys chocolates. I always give Ted chocolates before his bed. It’s a secret of ours. Then they went to sleep. I was up until about 2 in the morning. But then I had fallen asleep at some point. I woke up the next morning to the neighbours screaming. And then you know...then that happened.”

Will nodded. He watched the man before him shift in the seat. His hands were clammy, he was constantly rubbing them on the pants.

“Would you mind me asking what the troubling incident was that had happened?”

Reeds stiffened. He chewed on his lips and laughed. “I have already given a statement before.”

“Yes. But it would help us if you tell us what you said about the incident again.”

“Why? I’ve already told you about that. How would it help you?”

“It would help us if we could get certain things re-affirmed.”

Reeds contemplated for a moment before speaking, “We shifted to Baltimore four months ago. In the previous school some bad things happened...to some of the children. The...maths teacher, he behaved inappropriately with the children. Ted, he is hopelessly oblivious. He didn’t really catch on...but I knew. I understood from the way he spoke of the man. He said that the man would show him how to do sum and every time he got it right he would kiss him. The man touched my Ted, and he didn’t understand what that meant. I was upset. I talked with the other parents. Jeremy had actually been the one who told his parents. We lodged a complaint. Then we moved states.”

“You knew Jeremy Stones?”

“Huh,”

“You said Jeremy was the one who spoke to his parents. In your previous statement you didn’t mention that you knew Jeremy. He is also a victim of the same killer who killed Nathaniel.”

Reed’s face did a funny thing where his eyes went wide and his mouth fell open before he schooled it back to normal. He looked down to his lap then raised his head. His eyes were moist.

Will sat up straight.

“I knew it – from the moment I walked in to this room I knew that we were kindred souls Mr Will Graham. I can see it in your eyes too you know. Just as you saw right through me the moment I sat in this chair, I looked at you and I knew. We have a tell, people like you and I. It’s so easy to read if you just know the thing you are seeking. I can see it in your eyes. You’re leaking it everywhere.”

“I am afraid I don’t understand Mr Reeds. What does any of it has to do with Jeremy?”

“Ah, Jeremy. He was a good boy. Too obedient for his own good but a nice little boy. My father would have approved of him. That was why I was scared.” He laughed wetly. He was crying completely now but it seemed as if he didn’t notice. He leaned back in his seat, crossed his long legs and laughed. “There’s no point in pretending anymore is there? You know, they know. Now we all know.”

“Know what Mr Reeds.”

He sent a withering glare at Will. “That I was the one who had to protect them! Now I know, I know that it might have been extreme but that’s the only way these parents would finally understand the gravity of the situation! Children are weak! They are easily coerced and fooled. So easy to talk sweet to them, lure them to a secluded place and have your way with them! Have you ever seen a kid Mr Graham? They are so delicate, so vulnerable. Easy preys to hungry predators. Do you think it’s easy to do what I had to do? It ripped my heart into bits and pieces Mr Graham. I felt like I couldn’t breathe, like I couldn’t see, like I couldn’t do anything other than drown in the red rage that seized me. I was helpless.”

“Why were you helpless? You tried to save Jeremy. Did you succeed?”

He was rubbing his nose at the back of his palm, gasping and hiccupping.

“Of course. But at a great price. I was driving down the road, minding my own business when I saw him on his bike. He was running an errand for his parents. At half-past ten in the night. The gall of those people! I tried to be nice to him, offered him help. I might have been a little rough with my words. But I was scared. Anything could’ve happened to him. He was just so weak.” He trailed off, his eyes glazing over.
“What happened?”

“He-he became afraid of me. He started to back away, said he’d scream if I didn’t leave. That his parents were just around the corner,” he snorted, “like he could fool me with that lie. I knew he was alone. I knew his parents were snorting stuff in their home while they sent their kid to do their job. He was panicking and then he started to scream and I got nervous so I muffled him. But then he wouldn’t stop kicking and squirming and I was getting angry real quick. I just tried to be good but he wouldn’t stop moving.”

“And did he stop after you told him to?”

“No, no he didn’t. He wouldn’t ever stop. He used to tell me that the more I’ll say no the more he’ll know I was just faking it. So I had to be good until he stopped moving.”

Will knew that Reeds wasn’t talking about Jeremy anymore.

“Why did Nathaniel scare you Mr Reeds?”

“Oh he didn’t scare me.” He said, a trail of tear rolling down his chin. “Nathaniel was a good boy.”

“Yes he was. He was also very fascinated with weapons. He loved to play video games. You knew that.”

“Yeah, yeah. Ted told me that they loved adventure games.”

“Nathaniel was excited to come over wasn’t he?”

“Yes. He wanted to see the old, big knife that had ivory carved handle. It was a heirloom. My great grandfather got it as a gift from a Indian raja.”

“Did Ted see you killing Nathaniel?”

Reeds didn’t react to the question. It was as if Will hadn’t spoken at all. He was lost somewhere deep inside his head, halfway here and halfway elsewhere.

“You read my Ted's statement didn’t you?” he looked at Will with a sad lopsided smile. “You heard him when no one else did. See, I told you we are kindred souls. People like us can’t ever get away from our past. We are always being hunted. We are always aware. They didn’t listen to us when we screamed, it’s only when we fall quiet that they think to listen. What did my Ted say?”

Will's fingers had gone white around the notepad that he clutched in his hand. He didn’t believe he could say a word without falling down. His head spun, he felt nauseous. He just wanted to get as far away as he could. Away from this man.

“He said that he had a nightmare.” Will began his voice choked, though his face remained stoic. “He saw that there was a monster underneath his bed. He couldn’t move, he couldn’t shout. He wanted to wake Nathaniel up but everything was too dark. He said that he had started to sob and it was then that the monster came out and hugged him. He wasn’t scared anymore.”

A balmy light sparkled in his blue eyes, the red puffiness around it only enhancing the colour. “And what did the monster say?”

Will’s voice, when it came, sounded as if he was hearing himself speak from the top of a mountain while he was at the bottom of the rift.

“It’s the good boys that get eaten by the monster.”

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Notes

Hiii!!! I'm alive and I'm back! 😊
I hope you guys are safe and doing well!🌈🌈
You'll notice that I have change the summary of my work and tweaked chapter 2 and 4. Nothing major has been changed, but I've just redone certain plotpoints that no longer serve this story. You can re read them if you want, but it's nothing major.
Last of all, there's some smexy time in this one folks! I suuuuuuckkked at trying to make it flow, I've like rewritten the chapter bazillion times but I hope that I've managed to do it some justice. ¯_(ツ)_/¯
They've not gone all the way(つω`*) but they will... I'm saving that up for something. If you can guess, I'll incorporate your idea into that scene when I write it. So put on your thinking caps and hold on to your phones because this is gonna by messay!!!! (◯o◯ ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal smelled him before he saw him.

He was a curious mixture of rancid fear that was just only starting to go stale and a pique of anxiety and apprehension that ruffled Hannibal in a way that sat quite uncomfortably within him. His Will hadn't reeked of fear and confusion so intense since after their regretful encounter and the first few nights of them staying together when Will was ailing with nightmares and cold sweat.
Hannibal gazed upon the quivering figure huddled off to a corner in the narrow terrace that was stacked with some of the rarer and finer books in his collection, Will's back pressed against the farthest end of the wall as if he wasn't sure of his safety. He had the tapestry of the couch wrapped around him, the sheer white material doing little to warm the cold that Will was desperately fighting off.

Hannibal hung his coat and blazer on the stand and walked up to the fireplace. He looked up to see that Will still wasn't aware that he had a guest, so lost was he in the places that he was wandering all alone. Hannibal didn't like to entertain the thought of Will ever going to a place where his voice, his presence couldn't reach him.

"Will," he called out gently at first. Seeing no response, he tried once more with more command in his voice. On the sixth call Will finally managed to break out of the stupor he was in, shaking and trembling, soft breathy whimpers breaking free from his mouth before he

muffled them with the back of his arm. Hannibal allowed him space to reorient himself before speaking in a voice that was quiet but carried deep into the recesses of Will's mind.

"Your name is Will Graham. You're in Baltimore, Maryland. It's Tuesday 18th, 4:35 pm." He repeated the phrase until Will mumbled his response back, parroting the words until they finally breached his consciousness and Will was returned to him once again.

"Hannibal," he spoke and something inside Hannibal strained. It was an odd experience, to be so attuned to somebody else in such a manner. Hannibal was still acclimatizing to this shared bond between them but it still felt like a raw wound that refused to scab over.

"Are you cold?"

"I… yes. I am."

"Shall I come up there to give you my coat?" Will was silent for a small stretch of time before he shook his head.

"Do you wish to tell me what happened or how you came here?"

Will's pallor grew even more pale and Hannibal began to get the first pangs of intrigue.

"Bev dropped me here." Will said distantly.

"But I…" Will trailed off, his eyes fluttering.

Hannibal wanted to poke at that, wanted ask Will what he wanted to say but he let Will keep his secrets for now.

"Jack called. Congratulations."

A cracked, dry smile adorned Will's face before quickly disappearing.

"I don't feel quite congratulated. I would like to feel nothing at all. "

Hannibal remained quiet, watching his Will fading to the storm of his nightmares.

“Will, stay with me.”

His eyes found focus and trained on Hannibal’s, the rough edges of the state softening.

“Where else would I go?” He said and sighed. His tremors still wrecked him occasionally but his breathing was slowly coming back to normal. After fifteen minutes, Will climbed down the ladder. Hannibal had taken to sketching at his table. The next appointment was an hour later and he wanted to unwind from the day’s work. Will came around to his table, his fingers trailing along the ridges of the table and Hannibal belatedly realized that he had been tracking Will’s every move. Will came and stood beside him not peering into what he was drawing but more towards the man himself.

“Take me somewhere far from here.”
Hannibal considered it. He usually took his 24hours cancellation policy very seriously but exceptions could be adjusted. Given that his next patient was Franklyn also eased the process of his decision making.

“We can go now if you want Will.”

Will’s mouth fell open slightly in surprise. Was it still novel to Will to think that Hannibal would do anything for him should he asked for it?

His deprived little warrior.

“*Please*,” Will’s lashes shuddered as if in pain. Hannibal reached out to the curled fists by Will’s side and brought them up to his mouth so that he could kiss each knuckle gently and with care.

“You need only ask, my Will.”

They had drove back to Hannibal’s place to collect some change of clothes and other things.

Hannibal had cancelled or rescheduled his sessions for the next two days, only after seeing to it that Will was out of his dreadfully wet clothes and had a much needed steaming bath. As Will soaked away his weariness, Hannibal decided to pack a little meat and wine for their impromptu get-away. The cabin by the sea that he decided to take Will to was furnished with all the necessities and if he remembered clearly, there was a well-stocked cellar with some of the more priced wines that Hannibal had acquired over the decades.

They wouldn’t be wanting of drinks there but he supposed Will would feel satisfied if he served the wine that Will had bought a few days prior, all bright eyes and shy smile. Though he had sheepishly admitted that it came from a subpar mall and Hannibal could already taste its blandness by just looking at it, but he supposed that it was the intent that mattered.

When Will descended the stairs Hannibal let himself openly drink in the visage that Will was. He was a sight to behold, dressed in a more formal casual attire of a button-down prussian blue shirt cuffed at the wrists and a dark gray dress pants that hung from the cusp of his hips, the shirt tucked in imprecisely. His tousled hair was combed down, curling around his ears and the slope of his nape. Will was pale but blushing after the bath, though Hannibal thought the dusting of that alluring shade of red was more due to the shared knowledge of Hannibal’s admiration rather than the luxurious bath. There were still the impressions of his nightmares lingering beneath his cerulean eyes. Will hadn’t shaved, and the lines around his mouth borne of a perpetual grimace that he now adorned made him look just as suffered as a saint immersing themselves in sins. Will had always been beautiful in his suffering, ethereal in the way he interacted with pain.

“Is this alright?” The question was muttered hastily. Will didn’t meet his eyes instead focused on the dog that tried to climb over him.

“Alana gave me high praises about this Crèche and assured me that her contact over there wouldn’t mind having Winston over for a few days. He is a rather quiet and well behaved dog.”

Will knelt to kiss Winston all over muttering praises and promises to him as of he could understand. By the way Winston responded verbally to everything Will was saying, it was possible. However he had caught the reddening of Will's ears and as much as it pleased him to tease dear Will, they still had the entirety of two days to have that kind of fun.

“And of course, you are as captivating as always Will.” The young man scowled, Hannibal smiled serenely. The ride to their destination was a quiet and poignant affair.

****

The road gradually left the mundane of the city life behind. Miles of empty roads save for the occasional motels or gas station aside, it was a lonely journey. By the time they drove into the periphery from where his property began, the sun was almost a red ball in the sky, amidst the brilliant hues of yellow and orange. Will was close to dozing off. He had his legs drawn under him, his head resting on the window. There were no words spoken and it was just what Will needed.
Hannibal parked his car outside before gently calling Will. They stepped outside of the car and Hannibal could feel Will's awe through their bond. He dazedly walked towards the bluff of the cliff that overlooked the Chesapeake Bay, their cabin a lone, tucked away light in the

emptiness of the surrounding. The horizon was visible and lovely, made all the more breath-taking as Will's bright blue eyes washed over it.

"This is beautiful," He whispered reverently.

"Indeed. I must admit that this reminder of our mortality, of how time erodes, inevitable and devastating but beautiful nonetheless is one of the reason I was persuaded into buying this estate. The bluff has been eroding through the centuries, it has changed from how it was when I first came here years ago and it will change once again when we are gone."

"Certainty in destruction. An inevitable constant."

"We've been living a life of assured destruction from the very moment we are conceived. Cells multiplying only to die in multiples. Life becomes all the more precious when its frailty and endurance is celebrated. Death becomes all the more palatable, no longer a stranger to be feared but a dear companion to cherish."

Will huffed a quiet laugh. His eyes beholding Hannibal's as the streaming light of the setting sun shadowed Will's features. "I don't know if I should call you morbidly optimistic or nihilisticly morbid."

Hannibal's eyes crinkled as he smiled.

"Pragmatically morbid. Let's go inside, I believe dinner is waiting for us."

Will gave a confused frown. "You ordered takeaway?"

"Never", came the affronted reply that made Will chuckle, "I merely asked my acquaintance to conjure what ever meal they could for tonight before leaving."

"You have acquaintances who live in your cliff-side cabin and prepare dinner for you?" Will asked incredulously.

Hannibal only winked as he ushered them inside, the cabin homely and spacious brimming with warm but dulled lights and a hearth crackling and spluttering heat.

"Only the best kind."

A meal was indeed waiting for them. It was beautifully laid out on the mahogany table that was big enough to sit six people comfortably. There were decorative pieces cluttering the middle of the table, nothing as ostentatious as skulls or antlers or shamanic paraphernalia as Hannibal's own table had but as Will's fingers traced a pretty little porcelain showpiece kept on the table, he felt that the occupant must be whimsical, though the precision with which every dish was arranged spoke of them being very disciplined, even to a fault. Will didn't look at the food, already assured that it must taste heavenly as from the rich and aromatic fragrance. He busied himself with looking around the big place. There were a couple of places where porcelain showpieces and colourful crystals adorned the corners, but they were kept so almost carelessly. As if buying such knickknack was a habit but they didn't mean to decorate the place entirely. The floor of the veranda that was bounded by ceiling-to-floor sliding windows had a soft metallic grey carpet that was more fur than wool. Will walked on it barefoot, letting the material tingle his feet. He breathes out the stress and worries that were weighing him down. He hadn't realized that he had sat down and was dozing off when Hannibal called him, asking if he had freshened up.
Will did as he was told. He soaked up in the bath for longer than he had meant. The fragrant incense that were burning in the washroom made him feel light headed and fresh. He'd have to ask Hannibal to thank his mysterious acquaintance for their thoughtfulness. He had brought some change of clothes with him. But the bath had really got him to relax, even more than usual and he felt a little bold as he looked at his still wet pale skin, more pink than a deathly white now, a few of his freckles on his cheek and chest becoming more prominent. He liked the way he looked now, with his hair carded back, he felt youthful. He brought his hand up to his jaw, traced the long line of his neck and felt the rise of his collar bone underneath his calloused fingers, and imagined they were his soulmate's. A pleasant stirring in his gut made him smile, a little bashful. It had been a long time since he allowed himself that intimacy. More than a year or so in fact. And thinking about Hannibal had always been more painful than pleasure. His fantasies only involved the older man embracing him so tightly that their skin melded, their bones fused, that they became inseparable. It was tamer than what Will thought fantasies regarding one's soul mate would be like. But it was better this. The slow burn of their attraction, the gentle touches shared between them, the winding conversations were more arousing than a mere physical act. Will felt hot as he imagined himself being seen by those maroon eyes, picking every thought and want apart, laying Will bare to the inevitable between them. Will was becoming impatient.

Hannibal had to admit he was surprised by the effort Chiyoh had put in. It was a very short notice, and yet she outdid herself. He set the table and lit some candles and was about to sit down when he saw Will coming out of his room.

He swallowed.

Will was only in his bathrobes, his feet bare, those thinly arched toes and their pale vulnerability sparking a delicious hunger inside Hannibal that he didn't try to control. They

were here to lose control together after all. Will smiled when he saw Hannibal gazing at him and didn't shy away from the attention. He came around the table and sat across from Hannibal.

"Please convey my regards to your mystery acquaintance. They really didn't have to do so much, but I'm grateful."

"Of course, hospitality is very important to them. It is something that was taught to us very studiously growing up."

"Your family?"

"Distantly. They came here for a work. While they did that, I lend them my cabin so that they didn't have to struggle with finding accommodation. They'll be leaving pretty soon."

"Oh. You don't talk about them a lot."

"Would you like me to? Then I'd expect you to return the sentiment."

"A quid-pro-quo Dr Lecter?"

"If you'd like. I always wanted to know more about you Will, surely you don't find it surprising."

"No," Will said as they began eating. "I just thought you already knew all about me."

"My dearest Will, I don't think I can ever know everything about you. You are and have always been an enigma to me. Even if I were to peek behind the layers you have around yourself like a shield, I may never get to the core of what makes you, you. I can only feel it, and yearn to see it."

Will smiled, although it looked more painful than happy. "I don't know about being an enigma Hannibal. All I've wanted is a quiet life, and it's something that has remained an untouchable dream. All the layers I have, as you say, are there with your expert help. Don't tell me you're foolish enough to have made the maze and left the map inside?"

"The maze is of your own making Will. I only encouraged."

“Hmm. Then perhaps it’s not a maze at all. But forts, made of dusty shelves and broken closets.”

“Is that where you’d hide, dear Will? When the ghosts of all those you had never met came crowding in your little room?”

Will laughed then, it was a sharp sound. Hannibal felt a bit on edge, not knowing where Will wanted to take this conversation, not able to restrain himself from poking at the creature that now looked from behind the green-blue eyes.

“Did you always know?”

“That your constitution is exemplary enough to have manifested without our meeting? Yes. I could always feel you, when I never knew who or where you were. In the biting chillness of my time at the orphanage, it was your giddy smiles that kept me warm and human.”

Will stayed quiet, contemplating. He gazed up from his plate and at Hannibal, his eyes moist. “I never felt you. Not until the day I met you on the road.”

A pang of excitement travelled through his spine. Hannibal leaned in ever so subtly.

“We met when Alana brought you to my office, Will. You were on the run, hysterical and in the middle of a panic attack. Jack retrieved you, called your father, when he couldn’t get through, he brought you in. Don’t you remember?”

“Oh no, I remember everything clearly Hannibal. I remember riding by bike through the trail on a humid summer day. I remember getting nauseous and feeling as if I couldn’t breathe. I remember crashing my bike and laying there, in the ground with the sun right above my face. And then I remember *you*. You carried me to your car, I only got more sick. You asked me where my house was. I could barely speak. But you understood without me having to spell it out to you. You took me home. You got into an argument with my Dad because he thought you hurt me. But then I told him it was fine, you were my soulmate. After I could stand up without throwing my guts out, you were gone. You left me. You lied to me. Why?”

“Sometimes circumstances are out of one’s control. Even though there was nothing I wanted more than to lay my eyes upon the entity who’s to be mine, you simply caught me unprepared. And as for the lie, Will, I simply wasn’t sure if you remembered. You were only a kid then, I didn’t wish to impose upon your young mind.”

“No Hannibal. You very particularly told me, and everyone else, that we met for the first time when Alana and Jack brought me to you. When I wasn’t a kid anymore, why didn’t you ask me then?”

“I didn’t assume you’d want to talk about it or anything related to your father as he is a very sore subject.”

Will eyes we’re hard when they met Hannibal’s. “I can’t do this Hannibal,”

Something dark twisted inside Hannibal’s chest, his face a mask of banality.

Will continued, “I can’t keep wanting to give all of myself to you when all you do is patronise me. I can’t – I won’t be yours if you continue to lie to me. Hannibal,” Will's beautiful face stared openly and hopefully at him, his head tilted in benediction. A worthy and wilful acolyte demanding his boon from his whimsical God. The ice thawed inside Hannibal by degrees, he perked up a brow.

“Don’t ever lie to me again.” It was both a plea and a threat, and Hannibal’s throat had never been so arid before. His heart positively tingled and if it weren’t for the gravity of the situation, he’d have laughed at the absolute joy he was feeling.

Oh, his darling soul mate was ready. He’s ready for the next stage of his transformation.

“I promise Will. There will be no more lies between us. If you allow me to see you, then I shall do the same. And I always keep my promises.”

Will nodded once, and they went back to completing the dinner. Once done, Will excused himself outside to the buff and Hannibal graciously didn’t stop him. He knew Will needed some time alone. In fact, so did Hannibal. He went over all the things from their past that Will might have remembered and never said. He was fairly certain that Will still didn’t have complete control over his bond. That would require him to reconcile his past with his present. He needed to venture deep inside the shadows of his mind that he so skilfully avoided, barricading them with monsters of a different kind. Will wasn’t ready for that yet. But he soon would be. Hannibal would help him see not what he was, but hold up a mirror for his soulmate too. He was nothing if not a dutiful soulmate. Anything less would be unacceptable.
Close to the end of an hour, Hannibal brewed some chamomile for the two of them. He brought one outside and found Will gazing out into the vastness of the horizon. He came and stood beside him. The air around here smelled of the briny seawater. It was bitingly cold.

Hannibal had slipped into a red full sleeves sweater, and he brought a light shawl for Will knowing that he had a strange aversion to woollen clothes.

When Will didn't move away from him, Hannibal wound the shawl over him. He let his fingers linger more than it was necessary, and brushed aside the locks of stray hair from his face. Will's face was still passive, but he breathed deeply and leaned into Hannibal's touch. Slowly, Will moved in to rest his head on the side of his chest with Hannibal's arm around his shoulder, holding him close. Will took the cup of chamomile tea gratefully, holding the fine ceramic cup between his hands and taking a long sip.

After a moment of quietness Will spoke, "I can hear your heartbeat."

And it was such a strange emotion that fact inspired within Will. He had never really considered himself a romantic. Even when it came to Hannibal, he always imagined things progressing with a certain amount of grace and propriety, their passion polite in the controlled strokes of brush. The canvas that they'd paint a perfect masterpiece and nothing less. But the more Will peeled away the layers of sophistication from around their bond, the more he realised that there was nothing controllable between them. Their bond was potent as a ritual performed under a new moon, a caricature of their dark impulses and light drive. Their passion didn't require brushes to light up the canvas, their fingers raw with the colour of their thoughts were enough. It was… bestial, in a most primal and innate manner, the surge of intense protectiveness that surged through Will as he heard the heartbeat. There was a Hunter's satisfaction singing in each of his nerves as the thought that this inexplicable man who carried himself so perfect that it'd be almost alien to attribute him with such human quality as a heartbeat, but here he was, basking in the knowing that beneath all his glamour and grandeur, Hannibal was unapologetically a man. A godly man but a man nonetheless. His man, made of flesh and blood and bone.

"I love you, Hannibal."

And he did. The words tore themselves out of somewhere so deep and forbidden within him that Will shuddered. He loved the man, the man who'd fuss over him as if he were a small child, the man who'd make him elaborate breakfasts and coffee in the middle of the night, the man who was ridiculous with his pricy gifts, the man who stubbornly insisted to drive him off for his prom, the man who was there smiling and clapping with pride when Will received his degree with distinction. He loved the man who made mistakes, who was uncharacteristically impulsive when it came to him, the man who grew to love Winston because Will did. There was nothing fancy or world-changing about this. He simply loved Hannibal Lecter. Will knew, that he'd love him even if he weren't his soulmate.

“*Will*,”

He looked up, thinking of saying something cheezy but he stopped when he saw that Hannibal’s eyes we’re shining with a glean. Will swallowed. Today was a day when they both cried too much, it seemed.

“Hannibal -“

But then he was swept off his feet. Quite literally. For Hannibal had crashed into him like the eroding waves at the cliff, and all Will could do was brace. It was almost violent, the way Hannibal’s lips moved against his own. Sharp teeth and demanding tongue. Will was being devoured and he didn’t understand if he wanted to move closer to Hannibal or run far, far away. If it weren’t for the arms that cradled him so dearly, so lovingly, Will would think that what they were sharing now was not a kiss. It resembled more a fist-fight, broken nose and chipped tooth. He’d seen enough of those to remember a lifetime. He had been in a few himself.

If he wanted to run, he found it impossible now as Hannibal had almost hiked him up. Will flailed embarrassingly, first because he was surprised and second because Hannibal could now undoubtedly feel just how interested Will had become from just their kiss. From the smug grin that Hannibal shot at him quickly as he stepped over the broken ceramic and carried them into the cabin, Will wondered why he found that charming.
But he didn’t have much time to wonder or do anything else because he was being kissed out of his breath again. Hannibal’s hands were everywhere : they were carding through his hair, tugging and tangling as he pleased, there were hands around the back of his neck, sliding down along his spine, on his chest and pushing, pushing against him until he was bouncing on a bed in a unfamiliar room, barely lit except for the light streaming in from the drawing room next door. Hannibal’s weight was a welcome anchor in his mind. He didn’t know where to put his hands, or what to do with his legs. He felt oddly flush as if it was his first time getting so intimate with another.

Hannibal finally released his lips and drew back. Will could hardly breathe. Hannibal didn’t fare much better. His ashen blonde hair was in a disarray that shouldn’t be as captivating as it were. His maroon eyes had gone dark, his cheeks were dusted pink. Will couldn’t take his eyes off of those thin, devilish lips that were now bitten red and lush. Will's hand around Hannibal’s forearm tightened. A hand came to sweep away the hair that had fallen over his face, cupping his cheeks. Hannibal leaned in and Will thought maybe he was going to kiss again but he only brushed his lips against his forehead. Will’s nerves began to settle, the fire only stoked more intense.

The next time that they kissed was when Will tugged Hannibal mid-way from when he was

pulling away his sweater. Prior to that, Hannibal had taken time and care to disrobe Will. The shawl had already slipped away in their way back inside, and all that was left was to take away the bathrobe. Will's pale skin bloomed so beautifully under his fingertips. He left a careful pattern of bruises strewn across Will's chest, down to his navel and around his supple thighs. He pinched the skin in between his teeth, suckled and lapped at it until Will was a writhing mess on the bed, a string of half-formed words falling from his mouth. Will gave as good as he got. Hannibal's entire back felt as if it were on fire, he could already see the red lines drawn across his forearms as Will held on to them as Hannibal moved above him. He had drawn back to rid himself off of the cloth when Will attacked. The sweater was bunched around his neck when Will quickly manoeuvred themselves so that Hannibal was the one on his back with Will sitting astride his midriff, holding Hannibal's arms around his head.

"I want to taste you."

Hannibal smiled pleased to have been taken so off guard by Will but pleasantly surprised.

"You may do whatever you like Will. I only demand that you do it with haste."

The sound Will's throaty chuckles filled his ears as Will raked his fingers down his chest and stomach and rested on his navel before wet warmth engulfed him.

Hannibal lost himself to the fervour with which Will tasted him. His hands remained in the same position as Will left them, only bucking and moving his hips as Will moved on him. His lips stretched so prettily around him, his tongue lapping at the length of him, those green-blue eyes peering at him through the dark lashes. Even though Will was a complete masterpiece inside his mind's eye, he still yearned to see Will in the flesh as he sucked him off.

"Only when you've been good to me." Came Will's sinful voice as if in answer to the question barely formed in Hannibal's head.

"Haven't I been the most exemplary dear Will?"

"You've been a big-headed prick." Will returned with a warning brush of his teeth against him.
Will climbed back on top of Hannibal, sliding their bodies together until they fit like puzzle. The bond between them was pulsing quietly, as if content now that they had finally decided to bridge this final distance. It amplified whatever the both of them were feeling, sending and receiving each other's emotions in a loop. Will lost himself in the unbound motion of his body as he moved forcefully on Hannibal. An arm encircled Hannibal's shoulder as the other rested beside his head. Hannibal felt Will's curls falling over his covered face as it bowed down next to him. Will whispered sweet nothings right into Hannibal's ears, hot and

tantalizing. Hannibal hadn't dared to move his arms but opened his legs to give better access to Will as they tumbled towards completion. Right before Hannibal came after having experienced Will's orgasm through their bond, Will so sweetly whispered "Hold me, please Hannibal," he turned them around in a flash, Will only moaning lowly as Hannibal quickly threw aside the sweater from his head and finally drank down the feast Will presented.

He looked absolutely ravished, a thin sheen of sweat coating his skin, his hair a earthy halo around his head, his pale skin alive with Hannibal's marks and blood.

Will said, "*Please*," and Hannibal abandoned all semblance of his usual self. His fingers wrapped lovingly around Will's neck, his palm resting on the divot of his clavicle. The other hand braced for support as he thrusted into Will's shivering body beneath him. Will's spent smeared around his own, the friction getting slicker and slicker as they bucked and writhed and thrusted until at last Hannibal came with a deep low rumble and Will raised up on his elbows, snagging his teeth around the thick muscles at the base of Hannibal's throat, his breathless moan reverberating through Hannibal's bones.

Afterwards when Will was deeply lost in slumber, the sheets entangled with his lovely limbs, Hannibal watched his soul mate in quiet contemplation. Will had committed to him after all. Had offered him his everything. And he did so by his own volition. They were on the cusp of their evolution. This bond would only grow strong and resilient, nothing could break them apart. No one would dare take away the softness with which Will held his face and kissed him, like Hannibal was worthy of tenderness. Never in his life had Hannibal ever felt the need for softness. To him, it was nothing but a facet of weakness. But then Will had smiled as him as if he were a newborn cub, had held him to his chest and kissed the stinging wound on his throat with a delicacy and affection that riled something immovable inside of him. Will had fallen asleep shorty after. Their bond beat contently and Hannibal closed the doors to this wing of his mind palace with an inaudible click.

Will would see.

****

Will opened his eyes to unfamiliar walls.
He stretched and sat up, the covers sliding away from his body. Will blearily looked around himself when the memories of past night resurfaced and his cheeks grew warm. He looked at himself and found that Hannibal had cleaned him when he had passed out. He heard footsteps and shuffling from the kitchen area and knew that Hannibal was already up. There was a pleasant tingle all over his body and he actually felt better. He had no dreams, no nightmares, no spectres to haunt him awake. He had slept soundly. He almost reached sleepily to ruffle

Winston’s head but then remembered that he wasn’t at Baltimore. Feeling a bit silly and a little sad, he got off the bed and walked over to the bathroom when his phone ringed again and he realised that his sleep was broken because of the sound of his phone ringing. He picked up his phone and saw that it was Alana. There were several notifications and missed calls from both Jack and Beverly. Unease spread through his body as he received Alana's call.

“Will, hey. How are you doing? I’m sorry that I disturbed you but I felt that it was necessary to give you a heads up.” Alana’s sweet voice was pensive and restrained. She sounded pissed off.

“I’m fine. Heads up about what?”

“It’s… Jack is about to call you. I told him, I advised him against this. But Jack will not listen to me. So I will caution you Will. Don’t say yes. I know that the ability that you have helps and saves so many lives but it does so at the cost of your sanity. Will, believe me when I say that this case is not for you to lend your ability to. Okay? Promise me Will. You will say no to Jack.”

“I don’t understand Alana. What case?”

Alana’s breath came in a quick burst. There was a muffled noise, as if she had just hit something and Will's stomach only fell down a pit.

“It’s the Chesapeake Ripper, Will. He is back.”

Chapter End Notes

Next update will be in the weekend 16-17th may.
So, you can guess when the ultimate smexy thing happens. If you guess correctly, I will incorporate your idea of a situation, or position or phrases into the scene when I'll write it!!!! You can comment that down below!!!
Thank you so much for reading, kudosing and commenting (to those who have, I love you, I do).
Take care 💛

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

> I'm terribly sorry that i couldn't upload this chapter on time. I'm writing the next chapter, hopefully I'd be able to upload it in this month alone. But not really sure about that.
> I hope everyone is taking care of themselves in the present times. We all need love and compassion and I am sending you all love my dears! 💛
> I am so thankful to everyone of who read this story and bookmarked it!! Especially those who comment because seeing what you thought about the chapter gives me so much inspiration! So really, thank you! 🌹🌼💚

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was rushed inside Jack's office the moment he stepped foot in Quantico.

The office was packed with Beverley, Price and Zeller talking quietly with animated gestures, Alana who didn't even meet Will's eyes when he stepped in and surprisingly, much to Will's dismay, Freddie Lounds.

"What's *she* doing here?"

Jack didn't answer as he took his seat and Lounds only smirked.

Will stood, feeling distinctly out of sorts and very uneasy.

"You've seen the Ripper cases before?"

"Yes. I attended the seminar on the Ripper that you gave a lecture on Jack."

"Good. Yesterday evening around 7:15 p.m. Lounds got a comment on her recent post on the blog she runs. The comment was from anonymous and they left coordinates. Lounds followed those coordinates and she was lead to a private property with an abandoned warehouse. She sneaked around the place until she found a way to let herself in, *illegally*, and saw the body. Then, instead of reporting it to the authorities, she ran the story."

“It’d be a disservice to my audience if I didn’t. After all, the story was brought to me.”

“Do you have any idea how many charges can be brought upon you Miss Lounds?"

“I am sure you know the number Jack. But the question is, are you going to send your novice into profiling one of the most prolific and elusive serial killers who hasn’t even completed his courses yet?”

“It’s not for you to worry. Show him the pictures you took.”

“Sure, if he says *please*.” Lounds turned to Will and gave him a bright smile.

Will looked between Jack and Lounds and gritted his teeth. “Please.”

“Attaboy. Here you go.”

Will didn’t know what he was expecting. Even after seeing the photos, pouring through each word that Jack had ever said about the Ripper, trying to recreate the crime in his mind, he had never once been successful in penetrating further than the surface level of profiling for the Ripper. Hannibal had a stern conversation with Jack when he was still testing his limits. It was a foggy incident. Will didn’t remember much of what had happened. But he wanted to be useful to Jack, he wanted to let him know he could do this on his own. That he was strong enough. Will had looked up one of Ripper's kills – a literal foot in the mouth tableau—and had bled all over Hannibal’s kitchen until he came home and found Will passed out. It was also strange, now that Will thought about it, how he never reacted so viscerally to crime scenes photos after that, which was very convenient because until the Shrike, he had been profiling by looking at the crime scene photos and forensic reports alone.

But now, as he looked at the photos painted with such controlled force of violence, he felt himself slip away.

It was almost silent, almost, save for the noise of a clock… or a pendulum swinging right next to his ears. His eyes followed the sound and saw the antique clock on Jack’s office wall slowly melting and dripping down. He blinked and the phone was no longer in his hand. Lounds' unsure face floated into the periphery of his vision but that wasn’t important. Nothing was important.

Because he had something to share. Something to show.

And the catch was, to simply see and know.

Will was standing in the middle of the recently abandoned warehouse. The light filtering into the big empty space were sliced neatly by the slanted windows whose shadows fell perfectly, too perfectly on the centre stage. A play of light and dark.

The twisted and mangled body of what used to be a person was swiped away with each oscillation, turning time back on itself until Will saw the body, an empty vessel yet incomplete. And then found himself labouring with a pleasant tune under his breath as he worked to break the limbs and the back bone, as he finessed the body into the form he envisioned. Until at length, he became a beautiful flower, an offering and a warning. From filth, he brought forth beauty.

This is my design---

The phone was ripped away from Will's hand shocking him out of his stupor but he wasn't in Jack's office. He looked around himself and saw people in forensic clothes, heard the shouting of reporters outside and was unhelpfully swept inside the warehouse by a pissed off Jack.

"What the hell is wrong with you Graham? Are you holding yourself together, and you better be because we only have 20 minutes top before they have to clear the scene and I have to start talking about why I have a civilian wandering freely in a high priority crime scene. Am I making myself clear?"

Will didn't hear half of the words Jack said but shook his head and stopped short because there it was: the body. The flower. He was here.

He saw the precise incisions bloom and seep through his clothes. He saw as his jaw was being pried open. He joints of his bones popped and cracked being folded this way and that. The skin of his body eas being flayed open and rolled into delicate swirls of petals, the sinews and tendons all being worked together to bring about his creation. The body was his clay and he would mould it and beat it into shape. The body was changed until it no longer resembled the waste of meat it was before. Will was however, almost a husk by the time he bled out and died, knowing that his sins would be his path to freedom, that retribution was his gift. A gift imparted by someone who only urged the process. Good things come to all those who wait.

Will blinked. For s moment there was nothing inside his head, all the noise had ceased and there were no ghosts lurking behind the doors of his mind. But that moment passed and Will

noted wryly that Garrett Jacob Hobbs was there with him, both of them watching Will convulse on the crime scene.

"I am disassociating." Will said as if under water. Garrett Jacob Hobbs must have grinned through his broken jaw.

"This… this has never happened before. I'm always there."

"Are you so sure, Mr Graham?"

Garrett Jacob Hobbs was replaced with the whining face of Reeds superimposed on him.

"Are you sure you're all there inside your head?"
Will shuddered.

"That no one found a way to slither inside that quiet place in your head you thought no one knew and dug its nasty little claws in?"

Will wanted to move away but found that he couldn't.

"That someone didn't steal the little pieces of you and replace them with its own?"

Will jolted out of the light grasp around him, as if breaking through the surface of the water. His vision swam, his throat felt raw and he struggled to breathe. There were people around him, anxious ones, worried ones, curious ones and annoyed ones. He could feel them on his skin. His stomach crawled. He struggled to get away as far as possible from the crime scene with his wobbly vision and hoped that he made it out far enough because he couldn't bear the wave of nausea that swept over him. He could feel Hannibal. Distantly he could hear the hum of their bond. He tried to hold on to that low sound, but it was as if everything around him was sand and he was slipping further down a hole the more he tried to get away. Will had never seen such brute violence first hand.

He was surprised by the lack of emotion he could feel in the scene. No, he corrected himself. There was emotion. Something amorphous… something akin to pride and satisfaction and a curious sense of aloof amusement. As if the trauma the victim went through was only a distant afterthought. Or, the trauma was the design after all, transcendent and not banal. Will was torn between being riveted and revolted.

"Your name is Will Graham, you're in –"

“I know who the fuck I am!” Will snapped feeling caged in. He walked as fast as his legs could carry, far away enough so that he no longer felt as if his skin was being peeled away layer by layer.
When his vision was more than blurred faces and smudges of lights and shadows, he could see that he had unfortunately stepped into a circus of cawing reporters and bloggers, all hankering for the attention of an official. There were big, burly people in uniforms mixed in with the police personnel who were keeping the expanding circle of curious people at bay. Lights flashed at his face and he groaned in annoyance. There were forensic people running like madmen trying to contain the situation. Even if the body had been discovered at the middle of an old run down factory plot, these people were drawn to its smell like flies to dead meat.

A particular voice stood out to Will the most out of the cacophony of noise. He had no difficulty spotting the smart fiery curls of Freddie Lounds trying her hand at a pissed-off Jack who tried to rein in the situation. She caught his eyes and gave a sky smirk, all teeth. Will wanted to return the sentiment but he had learnt from last mistakes.
Jack turned around in a flurry amidst a hale of even more pressing questions. Jack knew he was taking a risk, Alana had informed both of them, actually, the three of them, in no uncertain terms that they were taking a huge gamble. But if Jack’s hunch was true and this was truly the Chesapeake Ripper, then Will believed that Jack was prepared to go to any lengths necessary.

Jack grabbed his elbow and dragged him inside the run down factory and gave Will only a moment to collect himself before asking, “Is it him?”
Will thought carefully before he spoke. He had seen the pictures, he had read the files. He remembered each deliberate action the Ripper performed on the victims, had the images of his hard work ingrained in to his soul. He knew how he preferred to execute his demented version of judgement. The kinds of trophies he took from all of his 18 reported victims.

And yet, to Will, the Ripper moved in the shadows. He stood right beyond an opaque wall, Will could almost discern his silhouette but it was slippery and fragmented. As if he deliberately left only morsels of his true motives, his identity behind to see if there would be anyone smart enough to piece together those pieces and break through the wall.

“I cannot conclusively say that Jack.” Will told almost delicately. Jack's face only grew grim. Will soldiered on.

“This feels… despite of the careful and meticulous planning, it feels whimsical. The victim is probably going to be someone well known, or well connected. This is a gentleman’s version of public shaming. Or just someone who thinks of himself as being more than this lowly crea- the man. The set up, the way the body is positioned in the middle of the raised place, it is almost like a stage. He is supposed to be the actor, or character who thinks he is the actor,

while the killer manoeuvres everything just how he wants. The extensive amount of physical trauma and the precision is a tell that he knows what he's doing, that he is sadist and obsessed with perfection. Price and couldn't say for sure if any organs had been removed without disturbing the scene completely. If this is not the Ripper, then he is someone who's just trying his hand out in public for the first time. It's not the first time he has killed. Or has killed so… blatantly but it's the first time that he chose to display something he feels passionate about. If it's the Ripper… then I suggest that your don't hold on to those thick bunch of profiles you have on him Jack. He… has no concrete motive, if he has a pattern, it's because he wants us to think he has one. If you thought that he is a psychopath… I believe that he's amused at our kindergarten grasp of his blown up self regard because… he is more passionate about these… tableaux that he creates. He thinks of himself as an artist unparalleled to anyone. He creates life out of death, beauty out of carnage, awe out of horror.

"He knows what he is, and he wants to know if we can see him as well. He made this mote personal because he is cocky and arrogant and bored, and anticipating. He made this closer to his home to taunt us. The victim is someone he knew, probably conversed with and found lacking. He wants to see if we can see what he saw. If this is the Ripper Jack, I think he is asking if you'd like to play his game."

The body of what used to be a man was peeled and pinned into position, skin and muscles crafted and beaten into shapes, folded and stretched until at length it bloomed into a Begonia.

Will coughed up more blood, the wounds on his body slowly dispersing away leaving only stained clothes. He looked around until he saw Hannibal watching him. He had blood on his face and on his suit, Will remembered shaking himself free from Hannibal's touch. He couldn't see anything beyond the neutral expression of his face. His posture was relaxed and he was carrying Will's coat in his arms though he remained at a good distance from Will. He didn't know what he ought to do now. Jack was yelling at the people to clear the scene quickly, there were reporters gawking at everything that happened. Will didn't think Jack would want to speak to him now until the body was properly examined at the lab. That left Will the only choice of leaving the scene to wait for Jack's call. Two agents came forward to escort Will and Hannibal out of the hands of the public and safely to their car.

They drove back to Baltimore and neither of them said anything. Will thought back to the last time he had an episode where he disassociated, but his mind was unhelpfully quiet thought he felt a certain unease. It also was only a coincidence that he had a sound sleep without breaking out into nightmares or sleepwalking when he was away from their house.

When he got out of the car, Will paused for a moment. Hannibal has stopped as well, watching him with patience. When nothing happened, Will let out a deep sigh and walked inside the house. It was silent in a way Will had forgotten about. After he brought Winston, the house was always awake.

“Wait,” Will slipped his hand into Hannibal’s and rested his head against his chest.

“I’m sorry for snapping at you in the morning.”

A hand rubbed soothing circles into Will's back and Will leaned further into the touch.

“I am not upset Will. I understand that the nature of the crime was especially brutal. I am only… worried about you. For a moment, I believed I lost you.”

Lost. That was such a strange word. The way your mouth shapes the form of the word is foreign. L-O-S-T… Will reckoned he felt a bit like that. It was almost so foreign, the way he sometimes understood himself. There was always a certain way you think yourself to be, the way you’d look when you look at the mirror. Your own voice echoing through out your brain and you expect, that the person you grow up to be, living in this body, would be a certain kind of way. But Will always thought he wasn’t the way he thought he was. And it was a common thing. Only that, Will… felt more lost than ever.

But he had his anchor amidst this storm. He pressed his face into the crook of Hannibal’s neck. When the grip around him tightened, it was like a quiet assurance. That he wasn’t floating away untethered, that he had someone to hold on to him. And so they stood in the middle of their house, holding on to each other until they felt safe and grounded.

“Do you think you’ll need my help upstairs?”

“Are you looking to invite yourself in to my room Dr Lecter?”

“As much as I would love nothing else, I think you need some time to collect your thoughts.”

“Ah, my thoughts.”

“Will,” Hannibal called out as he was climbing the stairs, noticing a different cadence to the way he called out his name.

“Hmm?”

“*Miegoti*.”

Will's body went stiff, a barely noticeable shudder and Will stopped, frozen on the stairs.

Hannibal approached him softly, letting his fingers slip through his curls and trailing them down purposefully to the back of Will's neck, the other hand ran across the heated up patch of skin where his soul mate mark blazed and gripped it tightly as he pressed Will's back flush against his chest, steadying him and thus, completing the motions of the routine with practised finesse.

After humming for fifteen seconds, he brought his hand up to Will's cheeks and turned his face towards him.

"You are slowly wading into the quiet of the stream in your mind Will. Listen to the stream, follow the rushing sound. Let it wash over you. Let it calm your mind, your body is light and weightless. There is no darkness. Only the stream, the peace and you Will. Follow the stream and listen. Do you listen?"

"… yes."

"Come Will,"

****

The office was fucking white.

It was so white that it hurt Jack's eyes even if he wasn't looking at the things inside the office because he was so caught up with carrying out the staring match with one Miss Purnell.

Everything was a shade of sterile, cold and cynical white. Even the paintings hung on the wall were probably what they called modern art nowadays. Kade Purnell was as aloof as one of the walls and she sat there in her white leather chair, looking a little perplexed but mostly affronted.

Jack was going to have a really long shitty day.
Purnell pointedly went through the hefty stack of reports, her eyes growing larger and larger while her brows climbed hills upon seeing Jack's frankly idiotic operations with Will Graham.

She finally squinted at Jack and let out a scoff before she even began.

“Crawford, tell me, how in all possibilities, did you think that letting a civilian who still hasn’t completed their degree run around crucial crime scenes was a good idea! Have your long standing obsession with the Ripper finally rob you off your good senses?”

“Will might be just a civilian, but he has been gifted with abilities beyond our Comprehension Ma’am. You’ve heard about the Karim Twins?”

“Are you joking with me Crawford? Of course I have. Everyone has. They shared heightened psychic abilities. What is your point?”

“It’s not just that they shared psychic abilities, they could manipulate speech patterns to break in through the linguistic codes and connect, however in a very limited sense to other people’s mental processes.”

“Mind reading shared between two twins who were each other’s soulmates. A cliché full of tropes that could even put Hollywood into shame. Crawford, you are testing my patience here. What does Will Graham have to with an urban legend?”

“What if I tell you that Will Graham is the living, breathing example of such an urban legend, but to a whole another degree of functioning. He's abilities are not recorded in some personal journal of a rooky doctor from sixteenth century but we've had first hand experiences of his mental prowess. His neurological and psychological tests over his formative years have provided a unique window for us to look into the inner workings of soulmate bonds. And not only that, how soulmate bonds often play a crucial variable in forensic crimes. Will had so far solved three cold cases from the reports and photographs of the crime scene. He successfully managed to stop the Shrike. He even put Reed behind the bars. Will's Constitution not only allows him to empathize to a great extent with the victims or the crime scenes, he could get into the minds of the victims and recreate their last few moments before death, while also allowing him to profile the killer from a new perspective. He is valuable to our force Ma’am.”

“Even if I were to consider those points Crawford, he still has no legal grounds to be present at an active crime scene. He’s not been formally trained and he has no prior experience of working in such fields. I have seen his most recently psych eval he got to interview as a cadet. He failed in all the important fields. He has not let any specialist to study or has contributed willingly in any matters since after he turned 16. Crawford. You are walking on thin ice. When it breaks, no one will be there to catch you.”

“With all due respect Ma'am, there are still time-tested laws regarding soulmates in operation in certain states. One such law dictates that if a person of reputable presence in the service of the State provides logical and satisfactory clauses to be assisted by his soulmate in their effort to provide service, they are allowed to. Such a law is operable in Baltimore.”

The thin eyebrow twitched as Purnell reigned in her reactions. She smiled stiffly and leaned back, “Is there now. And you have…applied for one such provision?”

“Not me, but Graham's bonded, Dr Hannibal Lecter has had applied for the certificate when Will turned 18 and he proactively began consulting with me in official capacity.”

“Ah. Dr Lecter. I see. And has he got the certificate?”

“The request seemed to be still being processed at the centre Ma'am. We would be highly obliged if you looked into that matter, since that department is adjacent to your supervision.”

“Hmm. I’ll make a note of it. But the Board will not be satisfied with a flimsy certificate about Graham prancing around the media like a topic of hot garbage. We need more data on Mr Graham’s abilities and state of mind. There need to be certain ramifications to be included in your personal report Crawford. You are a senior and one of the most experienced people we have working. Such amateurish conduct is unbecoming. The media is having a time of their life speculation outlandish things about the FBI and it’s humiliating. Even if you had appealed for a certificate Crawford you could have reported to the Board of your findings. And instead, you used Graham like a near party trick in this circus! A suitable reproach will be handed out to you soon. And apart from this, the Board will need a fresh start with the peculiar Mr Graham. And under the supervision of someone who is altogether impartial and adept at their craft. Let Mr Graham know that it is non-negotiable. You are dismissed.”

Jack heaved a sigh through his nose. It could’ve gone much worse.

“Sir,”

He looked up to see Katz standing at the hallway holding a few books in her arms. “You need help with that Katz?”

She spluttered and Jack felt a little better torturing his cadet a little.

“I was joking. At ease, Katz.”

“You really suck at making jokes Sir. But I was wondering if I’m allowed to ask how the meeting went.”

Jack hummed. “Will is not completely off the hook. He has to be psych eval-ed by someone the Board brings in.”

“Shit.”

“While I do share the sentiment, mind the language.”

“Sorry Sir.”

“But I’m glad you came to me with this information about the ancient law Katz. It’s convenient timing.”

“I’m happy to Sir. But this isn’t all me. During one of the long conversations I had with Dr Lecter and Will at their dinner, he mentioned it in passing. He collects such rare and unheard of traditional norms and laws regarding soulmates over several cultures. It’s a hobby of his I guess.”

“Yes. He is a man of many hobbies it seems. Anyways, when is your training beginning Katz?”

“Uh, around the next summer.”

“Good. You’ll be working with me. I’ll send a letter to Professor Grimes saying the same. I hope to see you doing well during your training Katz.”

“Yes Sir. Thank you sir.”

Now that all was settled, he couldn’t wait to go back home.

****

There was a touch of roughened fingers on his cheek.

Will opened his eyes and found a set of similar blue green eyes looking back at him.

“Dad? What’s wrong?”

He didn’t answer. His, face was hidden by the shadows in the room. Will reached for his bedside lamp but his father stopped him.

“It’s alright. You can go back to sleep.”

“Are you sure? Did you have a nightmare?”

He couldn’t see what his father looked like then. He only heard a breath being caught up and then a forceful exhale, as if he laughed.

“A nightmare, eh. I suppose yes, Will. I’ve been living one for as long as I can recall.”

Will didn’t smell any beer on him. He had noticed that his father was trying to reduce the number of bottles he emptied within a day. Will wondered if he was sick.

“Dad,”

“I had a good life with your mother. Growing up, I was clueless about what to do in life. I knew a little bit of everything, just not enough to be good at anything. I had no dreams, no ambition. I was an ordinary man. The most ordinary of all there. But then I stumbled upon her, and it seemed as if I found my purpose. Her smile, the way her eyes squinted when she laughed. It brought me joy. I wanted to do things that’d make her laugh more. Make her smile more. So she’d see me more. I wanted to be good enough at that so that she stayed in my life. I didn’t care about these marks that’s suppose to tell you who you should live your life with. She turned my life around, and I promised to her, that I’d always make her smile.
And then when we had you, we were the happiest we had ever been. You were her dream. A child to play with, someone she’d care for. She loved that dream of her. To be in a loving house with a kid whose laughter would make the house a home for her. I was so happy to see her happy. She named you Will, because you’d not cry easily. You weren’t a fussy baby, you were so quiet and sweet. She said you’d have a big heart and a broad shoulder. A loving person and a strong man. She wanted to see you grow up. She wanted to be there when you’d

have to leave for school, when you'd dance or sing, when you'd graduate or find your own soulmate. She dreamt for the both of us, and I was happy to provide that life for you. For us."

"…. Dad?"

"During your eighth birthday, I was in the factory. I had just come from recess and talked over the phone with your mother and she told me to bring some pastries in the evening. I went for my gears when my left arm was suddenly on fire. It prickled and singed. The most uncomfortable feeling I had even experienced. I turned my arm and saw red angry lines carving themselves on to my barren skin. It was burning but I couldn't stop it. I tried to scratch at it, cover it with something but the lines wouldn't stop appearing. It continued until it suddenly ended. There was a name written across my wrist. A messy script, too big and slanted. It was a name."

"Whose name was it?"

"Someone I wish was never born."

****

Will sat up on the bed. He saw Hannibal asleep beside him. His stomach felt full but his mind was a mush.

He reached for his phone and saw it was midnight. He had lost time again.

Will sat there for a while, not really thinking or computing this odd piece of memory that filtered in through some sort of barricade. Because when he tried to recall when this incident had happened, he could come up with nothing. He thought of waking Hannibal up and ask him what he remembered of his father. Will couldn't remember him very much at all.

"Are you alright?"

Of course he'd be awake.

"I… would you hold me?" Fingers brushed against the thread-bare shirt on his back and

traced along the line of his spine. He shifted on the bed and drew Will closer to him so that Will's back was to Hannibal's chest. He wrapped his arms around Will's chest, pressing his face to his hair and breathing in. Will closed his eyes, matching his breathing to Hannibal's.

"I use the same shampoo as you, you know."

"Hmm. But it's not what I love."

"So you love my sweaty head?"

"I love all of you. The smell of you, the feel of you. The sound of you. Everything."

Will breathed out a little loudly, still unused to the frank manner Hannibal expressed his love. He didn't know why, but this intimacy rankled him sometimes. It felt fleeting, not there. Maybe he was truly losing his head.

"What are you thinking,"

"Only that I might be going crazy."

"The fun kind?"

Will chuckled. He held Hannibal's hands in his. There were long, small and thin white lines running all over his palms. They were old scars, some raised and some just a discoloured patch of skin. He ran his thumb over them, over the hardened joints of his fingers, over the veins on his wrist. Hannibal's hands were artistic, long and oddly frail. Will wondered about the part of his past that he never talked about. He wondered if these scars came from when he was at the orphanage.

"They don't hurt anymore. Though there are days when I think if I press them I might get some sensation. It makes me hesitate for longer than few seconds. But then I press them anyway, and it's all right."

"Are they really honourable? Do you think scars are statements to the things that failed to bring us down?"

"It could be, but mostly it's only a reminder of our fatality."

“Just walking vulnerable meat bags.”

“Not us.” Will's face was turned and soft lips touched his own. Will’s eyes fluttered close and his hand came up to hold Hannibal’s neck.

“We’re extraordinary Will. Every time I look in to your eyes I believe that I can be much, much more than what I am now so long as you are with me. I look upon you and I think of how grand the bond we have between us is from the rest of the banality. Your eyes, Will, they’re a beacon of light to me and every time I am with you I no longer feel alone.”

Will pressed a kiss to the corner of Hannibal’s brow. His hand came up to trace the strong features of his soulmate's face. “Were you very alone before?”

“Yes. But it had never bothered me. I sought solitude amongst a crowd. But then I met you, and I got the taste of what it is like to not be so alone and now I refuse to imagine a day with out you.”

“You make me sound as if I’m something forbidden.”

“You are. To everyone else but me.”

Will smiled turning around completely to kiss Hannibal. It was a slow gradual play of skittering touches and hot breathes. Will liked the sound of Hannibal’s exhales. He liked the way he could peer into Will's very soul with the way he looked at him through his lashes. They kissed languidly, each taking their fill from the other. Hands sought out skin hungrily, as if starving from decades of an unknown famine. Heat bloomed between them strong and fast as they kissed, bit and held each other. In the tangle of their limbs, Hannibal found himself on his stomach, his neck bared to Will's tender attention. Hands pressed into his clutched. He saw the way their fingers were intertwined, like old trunks of a big tree. He could hear Will's fervent whispers of adulation. He refused to close his eyes at the intensity of the pleasure he was encountering, willing himself to chalk every breathy word moaned into his ear to his unfolding memory palace. An entire wing was dedicated to the feel of Will Graham. It was being collecting a plethora of memories, of every movement he made, of every sound he uttered the way his eyes twinkled or dimmed.

A particularly sharp bite at the junction of his shoulder brought a breathy groan out of Hannibal. Will rewarded him by pushing deeper into the cleft of his cotton trousers. Hannibal brought their joined hands underneath his chest. He pushed back to Will’s downward motions, a hand kept Hannibal’s back arched and he could see what dear Will saw clearly as if it were him behind and above and surrounding him. If it were him and Will, both together,

snapping their hip into the writhing body beneath. His shirt was bunched up in an alluring way, Will's hand roamed possessively over the expanse of his skin. The soft material of his trouser was rubbing against where he was wedged between Will and the bed. He could feel the dampening of his pants behind him and the smell of Will's desire elicited a loud noise of impatience. Hannibal reached out behind him to grab onto Will's hips, to urge him deeper and harder against him.

"Hannibal, Hannibal, my god," Will's voice a constant rumble inside his chest. His hands were leaving bruises, the rustling and their breathy moans saturated the air until Hannibal fug his nails into Will's splayed thigh and Will's breath got caught in hid throat as his hips jerked forward particularly hard, knocking the breath out of Hannibal.

"I want to feel you Will. Against me, in me."

"Shit,"

Will fumbled with the helm of his pants trying to pull it down enough to give Hannibal what he needed without stopping his short bursts of thrusts. It almost felt uncontrollable, as if Will wasn't inside himself. He felt too urgent, too hasty. He needed to be as close to him as it was possible. He wanted to see Hannibal *debauched*.

Will had already gotten rid of his boxers in their tussle earlier and he managed to pull down Hannibal's pant just below the crest, enough to see the sculpted flesh underneath his hands. He couldn't think, much less comprehend that he had the most put together man he had ever seen in his life panting and half- naked underneath him. Because Will had wanted him there and Hannibal would give anything to him.

The thought rushed through his blood setting everything ablaze. He held his cock in his hand and watched it as he dragged himself slowly down the line of his cleft.

"*Shit*," Will said because he didn't know how to speak. There was only this and them right now.

"I have lube in the drawer next to you."

Hannibal's voice was still too much in control for Will's liking and the drawer too far away. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes."

Will slid down the length of his body, leaving small open mouthed kisses trailing behind him until he reached his destination.

At the first touch of Will’s tongue upon him, Hannibal experienced the sensation through their bond. He could feel the absolute delight and arousal that Will was experiencing at that moment. Hannibal groaned under the ardent ministration of Will’s tongue, both of his hands pressing down around his hips and Hannibal could see the bruises it left there. He could hear Will moaning even more, moving along with Hannibal until their movement became indistinguishable. Will's tongue moved inside of him, the wet and positively hungry noises it left in its wake send waves of heat throughout Hannibal’s body. He reached behind him with his arm and got a handful of Will’s hair and tugged him even closer. The pleasure was almost too sharp, almost too much and Hannibal let himself feel the magnitude of his orgasm through the entirety of his being, Will’s name rolling down his tongue as a sweet fervour benediction. His body shook as he felt Will getting back on his knees and softly touching his sides. Hannibal turned, seeing his soulmate's face flushed red, his lips bitten red and shining, his hair a perfect mess. Hannibal held out his arms and Will launched himself at him, snuggling close to him and out of breath.

“My sweet Will. That was amazing. You are amazing.”

He felt Will smile against his neck. “So you’re the mushy type. Wouldn’t have pegged you as one.”

“I can be affectionate. Am I not usually?”

Will pressed his face into him even more, remembering all those embarrassing times when the good doctor had no sense of personal space and always found a way to hold, or brush or just stand too close to Will in front of others.

“No you are. It’s just… different, when it’s just us. You’re more tender.”

Hannibal slowly carded his fingers through Will’s hair, the other hand draped over his lower back.
“Do you want me to be cruel?”

Will was still hard. He could hear his breath catching up in his throat and Hannibal allowed a small smirk.

“I want to… “

“ Yes Will,”

“I want to cum on you. On your face. May I?”

“Please.”

Will climbed on top of Hannibal, straddling his chest looking like an otherworldly entity, alluring and enrapturing, victorious and lush as he took hold of himself wet and hard and tugged on it almost violently, almost painfully.

Hannibal watched with half-lidded eyes, his arms splayed on his sides completely relaxed and enjoying Will take his pleasure.

“Don’t look away.” He whispered, his voice a roughened deep timber.

“I am always looking at you Will. You are so beautiful. So beautiful, mylimasis.”

“Hannibal,” he thumbed open Hannibal’s lower lip, and let out a string of curses as he released on his face.

The sheer eroticism of the act raked through his body and he shuddered, pumping another long line of his cum that shot across his face, most of it being caught in his hair.

Will huffed, not moving and feeling as if every bone in his body had melted.

Hannibal licked the cum around his mouth and Will groaned.

“You’ll kill me.” He finally got off the bed and went to the bathroom to grab some towels. He brought one and gently began to clean themselves.

“Hannibal,”

“Mmm?”

“I really love you.”

Hannibal’s eyes were a darker tint of red in the curtained room and Will felt his breath being knocked out of his chest. He was so beautiful. Painfully so.

“I love you too Will. I love you more than I have ever loved anyone.”

Will smiled, “How do you feel about catching an hour or two of sleep again?”

“Pleased.”

_____

Chapter End Notes

(According to google translate, miegoti means sleep or go to sleep in lithuanian.)
By this time,, we all know what mylimasis means, don't we😁

Chapter Thirteen

Will paused at the gates looking over to the open fields and old trees contemplating whether he really should be going in there.

Even if he hadn't really known Georgia Madchen her death had affected him in a way that he couldn't shake off, couldn't get over. Even if he didn't know her in life, he did want to to know her in death. There was absolutely nothing he could do to learn anything about her. Her parents were reclusive and if there was no one who could tell him something more about Georgia.

He didn't like being in cemeteries. Too many bad memories rolled in to one place and it always made him uneasy, a feeling on creeping and crawling things moving right underneath his skin. He walked through the open gates and walked down the cobbled path. He didn't really know where she was but was hopeful he'd find her soon enough. There were other people in the cemetery, few silently staring at the headstones and a handful of them softly speaking with their loved ones.

Will must have been wandering for over an hour searching for Georgia when he finally found her. Her headstone was black with the quote "Dearly Beloved" etched onto it. He crouched down and placed the white flowers he had picked up from the store. He didn't know their names, didn't really ask the florist about it. But they were small and fragrant and he thought they'd be a suitable pick.
He stood there awkwardly, not really knowing what he should say.

"Hey, I'm Will. We talked for a while. On a group project. You were very quiet. But nice. I, I wish I had known you when you were alive."

He gave a short nod and turned around when an elderly woman stepped forward from behind a tree. Will was a little perturbed by the fact that the woman seemed to have been just hiding behind a tree for whatever reason, but he didn't want to stay here any longer. As he started to walk away he heard the woman calling out to him, "Excuse me dear, but are you Georgia's friend?"

Will was caught in the headlights. He stood there going over a hundred of different responses each useless than the next but before he could even articulate a response the lady came forward excitedly, cooing over the flower he had kept and turning towards him with wet wide eyes.

“Oh I am so happy to see a friend of her stopping by! It’s been a very difficult couple of months, child. Losing my little sunshine like that so suddenly, it just completely wrecked me."

“I, uh,”

“And you know we tried! Her mother dragged her to every shrink worth the penny all over the city but none could say what was wrong with her. She had been perfectly fine before! You already know that of course. But then suddenly, after the accident that is, she just… she just became strange. Scared her mother. My daughter is – was a single parent you see. It’s been so hard on her. She did right by my sunshine. Gave her all the medication she needed but the strangeness didn’t leave her.”

“What kind of strangeness?”

“Delusions really. She went on about ghosts and demons and imposters and such. Believed her hands weren’t really there and that her brain had fallen off her ears in the accident. She was just… but it wasn’t always like that. Sometimes she’d recognize us but the other times… it became a risk sending her to school. But I had warned her mom, I did, that sending a fragile girl like her to study the worst of what humanity can offer isn’t gonna be good for her head. But she never did listen to me.”
Will wanted to prod more, he wanted to know what kind of medication she was on, why didn’t they try to help her in some other way, how did she get to Quantico if she wasn’t allowed out and more, but it really wasn’t his place and he wasn’t Georgia’s friend. Whoever she had been, the only version of her that Will would ever know was someone that was lost in the shadows. The unease only grew within him almost making him nauseous. He excused himself from the old lady, tripping over his words and nearly ran out of the cemetery.

When he was back out side it was almost like stepping outside of a room full of people. He tried to shake off the feeling in his bones. He thought of buying something sweet for Alana before he went to their place. Will wondered if Alana would shut the door in his face and he thought he’d probably deserve it.

Alana didn’t shut the door on his face as it turned out because she was a better person than Will but the look of disappointment in her eyes as she ushered Will in was more devastating than a door to his face would have been.

Alana led him to the sitting room, graciously accepted the wine he had brought for her and promptly poured the both of them two glasses in the afternoon.

“That bad, huh.”

“I should probably not have let you come in.”

“I’d agree to that thought.”

“Will. Just… why?”

“I don’t know Alana. It’s not even because Jack told me to or because I feel like I could crack this case since I’m better than everyone else. It was almost a knee-jerk response. I really didn’t even think before saying yes and then… I couldn’t even think what I was doing because I had l-“

He stopped himself before he could admit that he was losing time. He lived with Hannibal and he never clued in Will about something being amiss with him. He still wasn’t sure if he truly was losing time or if he was somehow blocking his memories for whatever reason. At things were finally normal with Hannibal and he was happy where they were together now he didn’t want to disturb that peace. And telling Alana wasn’t going to be an option because she’d worry about him and then Hannibal would worry about him and if they all began to be worried about him then he’d worry about himself.

“Will? Is everything alright?”

“Yes – yes everything is alright. I am just- hopeful that perhaps I can give Jack something he can work on.”

“While I do understand your motivation Will your sense of self preservation is awful. Hobbes was a difficult case for you, and this last one… you think I don’t know the look of being lost that I see in you Will? I’ve dealt with so many cases where children are put in a situation they should never be in and it still rankles me, even after all these years. Will you had to walk in their shoes! Have you talked about this case to anyone?”

“I will. Molly – Dr Hooper is helping me out with some stuffs.”

"Look Will, it really is not my business but I don’t want you wandering out in the darkness again when there are people around you that you can trust.”

Something clicked in his mind. Like a box of memories cluttering down to the floor from the shelves that drown in light. He couldn't look down to see them, felt himself being affixed. Like he was mounted.

"Again? You mean Hobbs?"

"No Will. I mean after Charlie went missing and you completely shut yourself. And this case is so-"

"Alana. Who is Charlie?"

"Well he was –" she paused, "You don't remember him?"

"No. Not really. Who was he?"

Alana's expression soured. She took a sip from her drink, avoiding Will's eyes.

"Do you remember coming here with your father?"
Will wanted to say yes. He wanted to.

He nodded his head. "Mason was deeply involved with a local orphanage here. He was their cherished patron and the kids could actually have a healthy meal twice a day and extracurricular activities other than just being taught in the orphanage itself. Mason used to hold a camping trip on his property here during the fall. He was very friendly with them. And – uh, you'd hang around sometimes and you made a friend on one of those trips. He was not very young than you at that time. I don't know about the details but Margot told me he went missing on the trip. The police searched the entire property, checked the surveillance footage, asked everyone around but no one had any clue. You were still seeing Hannibal at that time and he told your father about your near catatonic condition. You… took the news of Charlie going missing too hard. We – you never said anything about that day and Mason had said that you were with him most of the time when Charlie supposedly disappeared."
Will's hands had gone cold. He kept the glass down fear of breaking it.

His head was unhelpfully silent. He tried to think of something : hair, a face, a word or a colour but he could come with nothing when he thought of Charlie. He didn't even remember this day. Or any of the days he supposedly accompanied his father here.

“Will-“

“It’s alright. I – I might have just repressed that memory and so I can’t remember it. I am really sorry Alana to have you so worried about me but I’ll be okay. I’m going to help Jack with the Ripper as far as I am able to. Okay? I’ll take care of myself.”

“I know that. Are you leaving already?"

“Yeah. I just came by to apologise and- just to tell you I’ll be fine. I have a movie plan with Beverley.”

“Will you don’t have to apologise for anything. I wish things were different. Say hello to Beverley for me.”

“Yeah.”

Alana's words clouded Will's mind. It had been a long time since Bev and him had hung out. But he couldn’t be completely present with her at the moment. He kept thinking of the little boy who he had befriended. This Charlie who had disappeared into the thin air and that had somehow affected Will so much that he had repressed the memory.
Beverley must have seen through Will’s façade.

She was always perceptive.

Will tried to steer the conversation to other direction as the Velocipastor played on the TV.
“How is your project coming along?”

“It’s a dead end. I found a source but they haven’t responded to my query. Jack had been patient with me on this secret project of mine but I think I’m just going to end up throwing darts in the dark. It was just a experiment anyway. To, I think, impress Jack with my hunting skills so he’d have no other option but to consider me as his protégé. I was just being unrealistic.”

“Jack already thinks you’re impressive Bev. And don’t talk down of yourself. You’re one of the most resourceful and intelligent person I’ve come across, you’ll make some headway.”

“Thanks grumpy-face, but without the source letting me interview them, it’s all going to fall apart.”

“What is the case anyways? If you can tell me that is,"

“You must have heard about it Will. It’s The Monster of Florence who was active almost a decade ago. Killed a bunch of people and strung them up like high Renaissance paintings.”

“Oh. That’s a interesting case.”

“Right? I was hooked by the narrative of the case when I first came upon it. Couldn’t shake it out of my mind until I figured out what it was that I was seeing but couldn’t name.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s just a way he killed his victims you know? Too meticulous, too organized, so much time and so much hard work. It just never felt that the killing itself was the motive. Did he get a kick out if it, I’msure he did but that’s just not why he did it. The way he arranged these people as a real breathing painting, well not so much breathing but you get the point, it just… I don’t feel like it was random. Those killings. Even though it stopped abruptly but I just… the way those killings were arranged it almost feels to me as it’s incomplete. Or if it was just an apprenticeship almost. A homage of some sort.”

“To what do you think?”

“His own capacity to do something so morbid.”
Will pinched his lips as he realised.

“You don’t think the I’ll Monstro stopped. Bev. Do you think that he is still active?”

“I don’t know Will. I have nearly nothing to base my assumptions off of. All these things I just told you, I’ve just got it from my own head. It’s not enough.”

“I’d have offered to look at the pictures for you Bev-“

“Hey, no, Will- I don’t want you to-“

“But I don’t think I should so you can see Hannibal about this.”

She paused, the refusal dying on her lips.

“The doctor?”

“Yeah. He studied in Italy as far as I know. He might be able to tell you something from his time there. I’m sure he’ll not mind talking to you about it Bev.”

“Oh. But are you sure?”

“Yeah. I’ll tell Hannibal once I reach home. You guys can take it from there.”

The rest of the evening was spent pleasantly ribbing on each other and laughing at the ridiculously entertaining movie. Will never would have thought that a priest turning into a velociraptor was ever going to be this riveting but he was glad to be surprised. They had a evening just to themselves, laughing and not worrying about anything. Those days had become rarer in recent instances but Will cherished these moments whenever he had them.

Beverley dropped Will off to his place and he bid her goodnight and walked towards the entrance. Just as he was making his way through the small pebbled path up to the stoop of the front door Will paused. He looked up and checked the surrounding. This part of the city was quiet usually. There were hardly anyone one the street and the primly trimmed bushes of the neighbouring house swayed gently in the breeze.

Will stared at those bushes for a second longer before making his way inside and locking the door. He stood there for a moment, wondering if he should check in with Hannibal and thought better of it. He thought of making some broth to go along nicely with the fresh bread Hannibal had baked in the morning.

*****

He hung his coat in hangar and stepped past the reception area and into the playroom. He could easily detect the greying mutt Will had become attached to. There were other variously aged dogs of different breeds hopping and running around the big room excitably while Winston was lying down off to a corner, occasionally wagging his tail at a few of the younger dogs who came and nipped at him. Hannibal was impressed by how neat and orderly this place was. He shouldn’t have underestimated Alana's recommendation when it came to these things after all she shared the same affinity towards animals as Will. They had taken good care of Winston and he seemed to be in a amicable mood even without the presence of Will. Hannibal made a note of leaving a good recommendation for this place.

He smelled before he heard the person coming up to him and tilted his head in light curiosity.

The man came up to Hannibal and smiled widely as he turned to face him.

“Hello sir. My name is Matthew Brown. I work here as a volunteer. How may I help you?”

“I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter. I have an appointment today to collect Winston from your care.”

“Oh! Winston belongs to you? I must tell sir, he’s one of the best behaved and frankly the most charming of all the boys we have here. You guys are so lucky to have someone like him.”

“I am sure his father would be glad to hear such high praises.”

“Oh. You are not his father then?”

“I am afraid not. My partner couldn’t come here to collect him so I am here in his stead.”

“I see. Well, please wait here I will bring him out right away.”

Hannibal’s lips twitched into a secret smile. He hadn’t got that particular whiff of wet farm hay and the unfortunate smell of hogs in quite a long time. It wasn’t even especially hidden behind perfume. It was almost deliberate. Hannibal was thrilled at the prospect. Anthony did say they were very close to his heels but he had thought they’d exercise better control but really, he didn’t blame them for their excitement. They ought to be very confident in whatever they had planned upon doing to Hannibal that they were being so blatant with the threat.

As Mathew Brown walked Winston up to him, the man sneering at him through dark lashes Hannibal let his smile grow. Brown read the silent warning, his eyes widening and mouth parting only just so. He handed the leash over to Hannibal and Mathew coughed when their hands brushed.

“You take good care of Winston sir. He’s such a charming boy.”

“Oh I will.”

****

Will was looking up local news reports on the disappearance of Charlie when he heard shuffling and the main door opening. He sprang up from the sofa balling his fists and saw Winston happily scuffling towards him followed by Hannibal. The tension bled out of his system in a rush as he knelt down to pull Winston close to his chest, rubbing his head and his neck and littering him with mumbled kisses all the while Winston squirmed excitedly.

“Here,” Hannibal gave him a paper bag and inside he saw toys and ab assortment of dog treats.

“Oh! These are… you know his favourites?”

“Why do you sound surprise? I’ve watched you feed him these every time he does something remotely adorable.”

Will grinned. “So you think Winston is adorable?”
Hannibal closed the space between them, half bowing down to kiss Will's forehead, his hand cupping his cheek.

“He takes after his father.” Will spluttered, the tips of his ears burning. Hannibal smiles leaning into kiss the lobe of his left ear, briefly sucking it inside his mouth and grazing his teeth across it.

Will shuddered. One hand went to clutch at the older man's forearm while the other still played with Winston’s fur.

“You’re in a mood today.”

Hannibal replied with stealing the rest of his air out from his lungs. Will held onto the both of them doe dear life and wished with an ardent urgency he had long forgotten for this moment to extend and stretch around them forever. Will was happy. He was confused about a lot if things in his life right now but being here with his soul mate and his dog, this felt completing.

When Hannibal finally let up, Will was pleasantly out of breath and grinning stupidly. Hannibal smiled at Will.

“Are you free tonight?”

“Yeah.”

“Mrs Komeda decided to gift me with two invitation to her favourite opera that’s playing tonight. I couldn’t say no to her offer. Will you accompany me?”

“Ah. I really wouldn’t mind but are you sure you want to take me there because I don’t think I can talk very amicably with your friends there.”

“Nonsense. I would take you with me everywhere I go Will. And as far as my acquaintances are concerned, you need not worry yourself over them. I will handle all the things.”

“ My saviour.”

“I do not believe you need saving Will.”

Will scoffed. “Whoever comes my way will need a lot of it.”

The opera was magnificent and lush as Will had expected.

It was a nice change of pace and even though Will cringed at the idea of talking to people, he was almost grateful for this welcomed distraction from everything that was going on in his mind. The people who came to attend were considerably tame than the previous two occasions Will had suffered through at Hannibal’s request. The audience looked just as riveted as Hannibal was during the performance so it wasn’t the nature of the play but the play itself. The event today was more of a niche variety and as they had exchanged pleasantry at the beginning of the show with Mrs Komeda and few others Will distinctly had the feeling as if it was by intention. It somewhat made the elderly woman more tolerable to Will. Even though the performance was interesting by its own right, Will couldn’t concentrate on the

show when he was so taken by Hannibal who performed his own version of entertainment quietly in the twists of his lips and the sparkle in his eyes. Will had more fun picking our the people Hannibal tolerated out of decency and the ones he actually enjoyed talking to than the evening itself. Of course he also enjoyed the stolen glances and harried kisses in between all the socialising. It was a giddy, almost a heady feeling to do this tomfoolery with Hannibal between the presence of highly antiquated people, some of whom were far more delighted by the thought of Hannibal bringing his young patience turned ward-turned soulmate to the public. One of them almost soolled their cherry wine in their excitement to knead out more information but Will's wry sense of humour had turned them away quite soon. “Spoilsport,” Hannibal had whispered in to his ears. Will had rolled his eyes.

“It must be so hard to perform ordinary activities given the trauma of the horror you have to suffer through in your line of work.”

“I guess. Horror movies have indeed lost their charm at least.”

The muted expression on the lady’s face and the barely hidden exhalation of a laughter Hannibal made made the night all the more palatable. That was until a vaguely familiar man came around them from a corner of the foyer dragging another man along with him. Everyone was content to ignore the man's presence though Will felt distinctly uncomfortable by the way the other person had his eyes on Hannibal following his every movement keenly though Hannibal seemed to be determined to ignore their existence even when the short, bearded round man fluttered in and out of Hannibal’s view.

Mrs Komeda however was getting Progressively more annoyed so she called Hannibal’s attention to it.

“It looks like this gentleman wants your attention.” Hannibal turned around with perfect poise a mild look of surprise drawn across his features. Will could read Hannibal’s irritation by the way the corner of his lips were slightly curled.

“Ah. Franklyn. How bizarre us meeting here.”

The man, Franklyn wringed his hands before him chuckling nervously. “Bizarre! Haha! Serendipitous too Ha- Dr Lecter. Who would’ve thought I’d meet you here.”

“Indeed. Everyone, this is Franklyn Froideveaux my client. I believe you have to excuse me for a moment while I talk something out with Franklyn.”

The man in question looked happy to be finally the object of Hannibal’s attention. He quickly

followed Hannibal to a distance and bringing the tall man beside him with him.

“Franklyn, did you follow me here?”

Franklyn's doe eyes we’re round with anxiety and they darted across to his friend who stood quietly.

“Dr Lecter I wasn’t trying-“ He stuttered.

“The truth please Franklyn. You do know how much I detest lies.”

“Yes.”

“Go on.”

“I – heard from Tobias that you were going to attend the show today. He heard it from one of the friend of his clients. He knew how much I – well, how much you’ve been helping me so he told me that you were going to be here and I – I thought I could… I could give you a surprise?”

Franklyn was growing to become a nuisance.
“Is Tobias your friend.” Hannibal glanced at the brooding man sipping champagne all the while not taking his eyes off of him. Hannibal gave a polite smile.

“Oh yes! Yes! I met him online really! After you told me that I should be more confident and should go out and mingle we bonded over our shared interests on the more… darker side of human nature. When I told him about you he insisted that we should come and say hello.”

Hannibal hummed. He approached Tobias with his shoulders wide and features relaxed. The man in turn openly smirked and extended his hand first.

“My name is Tobias Budge. I own the best cat-gut string here in Baltimore. It’s a pleasure to meet you Dr Lecter.”

Hannibal took his hand and shook firmly. “How fortunate since I was in a dire need of some strings for my harpsichord.”

He raised a brow. “Now that’s an instrument that takes a lot of dedication and gentleness to get some good sound out of it.”

“One only needs to be patient and nimble with it.”

“True.” His eyes slid towards Will who was conversing with Mrs Komeda and chuckling at something she said. “Is that your partner?”

“Yes he is.”

“Does he share the same knack for sophistication as you Dr Lecter?”

“I do not quite understand your question Mr Budge.”

“It’s okay. You will understand soon enough. Franklyn, come. We must leave now, let’s not trouble the good doctor anymore. Take care Dr Lecter, and do visit my shop when you have the time.” He offered a business card which Hannibal accepted. Franklyn unwillingly followed Tobias' retreating figure and Hannibal was left with a curious anticipation. So many things were at motion now. Hannibal wondered pulling which string would have the most chaotic of the results.

“Are you okay?”

Hannibal took Will’s hand in his and brought them to his mouth. Will blushed at the kiss but didn’t take away his hand.

“I think the night has been long. Should we retire?”

“Oh yes! I think I might lose my mind here and not even Mrs Komeda's wild tales of adventure can save me from the boredom.”

“Very well.”

As Will and Hannibal got in to their car and drove off, an ominous figure loomed in the shadows amidst the other cars watching and smiling.

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Notes

I was hearing and watching this amazing Hannibak fan edit :
https://youtu.be/atEv2xr38Jc
Sweet Dreams are made of this by Yasmin Benett. This had been one of the many edits that actually helped me crossover to the Hannibal fandom and I'm so glad that I had found it. Please give it a listen before or during your read.
It's on the shorter side but I didn't want to sit on this chapter for too long.
All I can say is.... The end is near.

“I didn’t think you were ever going to pick up the call.”

Will let out a dry laugh. It was nice hearing Abigail’s voice after so many days.

“Things were just happening one after another. I’m… I’m sorry that I made you wait.”

“It’s alright. I’ve been pretty busy with getting my life back together again. As much as I could at least. The FBI cleared my house and the cabin and I’m finally ruled out as a potential accomplice. So that’s something.”

“I heard. Where are you going to stay?”

“For now I’m staying at my best friend’s house until I get a foster home. They’re still looking.”

“I see. What do you want to do?”

“After graduation? I still haven’t figured it out really. Dad didn’t have a lot of money saved up. The little he did was all funnelled towards the girls’ families. Essentially I’m broke with only a couple hundred dollars in my name.”

“Is there- well, I was saying you could, uh, perhaps-"

“I don’t need your money Will.” Though the words were spoken carelessly Will could hear the suppressed smile in her voice. Will sighed through his nose. He was rapidly losing his ability to have a conversation with another human being without it becoming awkward. Or maybe it was just with Abigail.

“Hannibal had offered before you and I told him the same thing. The both of you are being kind… And I’m not saying it in a bad way but I’ve always been on my own. Even when Dad was alive. I know I can make it through this situation somehow. But I’m glad that I have you guys and Alana to talk to. I really wouldn’t want to be alone with my thoughts now.”

“Are you having nightmares?”

Abigail laughed but the sound of it was wrong, strained and ugly.

“That’s the problem though. I’m just having regular dreams, dreams I’d have before all of this happened, dreams about going to Paris and falling from a edge. The normal stuff. It is weird to be so bothered about everything when I’m awake and then not see it reflected in my dreams you know.”

“All of us deal with painful memories in a unique way Abigail. Just because you’re not having nightmares doesn’t in anyway lessen the terrible things that happened to you.”

“It wasn’t just me though. Those girls… I can’t even begin to think about how dreadful it is for their families.”

Will remained silent. Each of those girl’s faces still haunt him in his dreams. He remembered how they looked in death.

“But doesn’t karma work down the blood? What if something similarly dreadful happens to me Will? Something much worse.”

“Abigail, nothing of that sort is going to happen.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I’m not. I’m just… practicing optimism. I’ve been told I should do it routinely.”

Abigail laughed, the ache in his chest easing slightly.

“How’s that working for you Will?”

Will saw Jack coming towards him from the crime scene as the forensic team moved away to another location.

“Yet to see the results. Abigail, can I call you back some time later?”

“Okay. Hannibal said he was going to skype in the evening so maybe you could join in as well? He was going to help me with shading and texturing.”

Will didn’t know Hannibal was assisting Abigail in her artwork. “Sure. In the evening then. Take care.” He added belatedly.

He could hear Abigail smile when she said goodbye. Jack's furrowed brows were sunken as deep as it could go into the crease of the bridge of his nose. That never bode well for Will. And the body… was something else.

“All yours,” he declared and left Will alone on the centre stage of the opera house where a man with splayed throat and a violin lodged carefully inside the emptied cavity which used to be the chest and stomach sat back against a chair.

The swooshing of a pendulum swinging cottoned Will's mind as he stepped closer to the body.

There was little blood around the chair, only that which dripped still sluggishly from the open wounds. The man's jaw had been cracked open and pushed back as far as it could go. Everything inside the jaw had been removed, the only thing that drew the attention other than the gaping maw was the neck of the violin.

Will reached out his hand towards the strings that were the vocal cords of the man fashioned into perfect, taut strings. A phantom music drifted into his ears as he turned his gaze down towards this pathetic excuse of a man. A sneer broke out on his face as he touched the violin, humming the music he heard. What a waste of such splendid melody on fingers that didn''t know how to bend properly. *An artist who has no charisma, whose art is nothing more than dull monotonous drab is a sin unparalleled. A humiliation of the muses. One rotten egg spoils the rest.*

He came to stand behind the worthless man as the swoosh of the pendulum faded, overcome by the harmony of the music. Will closed his eyes, and played the instrument. He could hear the indescribable music echoing inside the Hall, filling him with peace and pride, after finally being able to play a fine melody out of him.

A solitary hand clap and Will opened his eyes.

Garrett Jacob Hobbes sat in the first row, grinning through his busted lips.

Will felt a huff behind him followed by a wet sensation on his arm.

He woke up to find himself teetering on the edge of the stage. He looked around himself but found something missing. It took him a moment to regain his senses before he realised that there was no blood, no wounds on his body mimicking that of the victim. He could still feel an echo of a voice lingering at the back of his mind that didn't belong to him. But there was nothing from the victim except for the abject horror and resignation he must have felt when he was bled out for the benefit of the killer. A sacrifice made at an altar to appease—no, challenge a God… to *serenade* a God.

Will ran a hand over his face, a headache growing steadily at the back of his head running down the base of the spine.

He called out Jack's who entered the scene with Dr Price and Zeller in toe. Zeller gave him a dubious look while Dr Price waved at him with a friendly smile but stopped short when he noticed the lack of blood.

"Is this something new then Will? Did your constitution develop? Hmm, well it's almost unheard of at your age but not altogether impossible. I remember hearing about a case in Brazil where –"

"Not the time Dr Price. Will," Jack cut-off and pointed at the body behind Will.

"It's not the Ripper, if that's what you're asking."

"And you know it for certain? This crime scene fits the M. O. of a Ripper kill. Ostentatious presentation, both pre and post mortem brutality, organ removal. Dr Price confirmed that the cuts made on the body is very professional, almost surgical."

Will shook his head. He refused to turn back and entertain the phantom music that still rang

in his ears.

“The body is not an end in itself. It’s only a means. The violence inflicted on him wasn’t objective, it was irrational. The killer despised the man. He chose to pass the judgement onto him after deciding that he had done enough blasphemy in the name of music. The killer had to tear him open to get a *decent* sound out of him.” Will muttered, sweat beading above his eyebrows. He didn’t look at anyone as he spoke, repositioning his glasses.

He flipped through the evidence report in his hands, gritting his teeth.

“ The strings attached to the neck of the violin… they are chemically treated, his guts disemboweled to make space for the sound to reverberate. The killer used a bow to play the victim’s treated vocal cords. They found residue of resin all over the throat and mouth. He’d probably have a prior confrontation with the victim. Some sort of verbal argument. The killer is well connected and runs in the same circle as his victim. He probably has a big place of his own, he needs a lot of space to do these things. It’s probably not his first time. Not the first public murder at least. This wasn’t a art piece Jack. The Ripper kills not because he has something to prove or something to say. He kills because he can, because he’s goddamn good at it. His crime scenes are tableaus because he expects nothing less from himself. Because he’s an artist. He kills, because he can create. But this killer Jack, he’s not even half as close to perfecting the art that Ripper has made and owned. Your killer wants his message to get across. This body was an offering, a challenge to someone he knows is better than him, someone who can teach him and if not that, someone he wishes to overcome.”

“Damn.” Jack ran a hand down his face. Zeller was staring openly at Will with a vial forgotten in his hand until Price helpfully nudged him to his work.

“You make it sound like this psychopath is serenading the Ripper.” When Will didn’t comment Jack let out a mirthless laugh. “What is with Baltimore being run down by a bunch of psychopaths every damn week.”

“It’s your own Gotham villain of the week, Jack.”

“Does that make you Batman then, eh Will.”

“No.” Will answered and walked away.

****

Chilton looked like Christmas had come early for him, and Alana supposed that it had.

She stared ahead resolutely as Purnell discussed Will like he wasn't even a living breathing person. Alana fought hard to control the words that wanted to break free. Jack had worked hard for Will to not be thrown in the interrogation chamber about his 'highly unusual' constitution by the Boards and as much as she resented Jack's allowance of Will straying too close to this grim world, she respected Will enough to not complain on behalf of him. Will had always expressed an interest in forensic criminology, and even if he didn't actively work on homicide cases as a detective, he still wanted to be able to share with people as much of his perception as he could.

Alana drew her gaze back at Chilton who off-handedly mentioned Will's past trauma regarding his father's disappearance.

"That part of his life should not be the focus of the present enquiry Dr Chilton."

Kade Purnell watched with an unhidden bemusement. "What's this thing about his father?"

"His father disappeared six years ago on his way from work. There was no trail, no witnesses. The case went cold. Will's involvement with the FBI has nothing to do with this past. He came to Jack with vital information on a cold case that he and his team had opened up. Will demonstrated his evidence for the case that was already present in the disclosed documents to the public with the help of his constitution and agreed to work with Jack in an unofficial capacity until Will got his Ph. D."

"Dr Chilton do you think you can draw up a usable profile on Will Graham? I only need a report that assures the Board of his capacities and finds him stable and fit for consultancy in a unofficial manner. Jack had made an intriguing case for him and after speaking with Dr Lecter, I am assured that his case can be treated as a special case, at least until he gives some breakthrough in sight on the Ripper cases."

"Oh yes Miss Purnell, I'll have you know, that I've been known to-"

"Just a yes or a no Dr Chilton, I have a headache."

"Ah, yes. Of course, yes." He parroted back a little put upon. Alana barely stopped herself from rolling her eyes.

Purnell turned to her and quirked her brow. “I was really hoping to hear your insight on Mr Graham’s peculiar case Dr Bloom. It’s a pity that you passed on this opportunity. I’m sure there are plenty of inquisitive minds who’d lap up the opportunity to study a mind that is presumably so unique as Mr Graham’s.”

Chilton sniffed while Alana gave her a pleasant smile. She was almost convinced to let her ungloved hand brush accidentally on Purnell's overpriced and ungodly purse. Her constitution wasn’t something she liked to use but on occasion such as this, an exception could be made.

“This pesky little thing called a conflict of interest is more troublesome to me than my relationship with Mr Graham I’m afraid. But Dr Chilton here has no such qualms. I’ll be happy to just correspond between the two parties.”

Purnell's gase hardened. She stood up with a click of her heels. Alana didn’t find it in herself to get up as well. Though Chilton was more than ready to do all the standing for the both of them.

“I’ll see you around Dr Bloom. Dr Chilton.”

After she was gone, Chilton sat himself in his centrepiece chair and quipped, “What a sour-tempered lady.” Alana did roll her eyes then.

****

Jack immediately sent out officers to a handful of instrument shops in and around Baltimore. If Jack had any questions regarding the lack of stains on his person he wisely didn’t say. Will was frazzled. He felt a certain way that very much looked like he was grasping at sand. His constitution had never not worked before. No matter the intensity of the crime, it always reflected on to Will's body and he would always glimpse the last few moments of the victims so vividly as if he were there. But this, this had never happened before. And with everything else that just seemed to go wrong inside his head, he couldn’t help but feel like je didn’t even know himself anymore. He wanted to go to Molly, call her before he decided that he would, but he wanted to check up on Winston before he went to her office.

As he pulled over though he noticed there was a black Camaro parked in the driveway. He didn’t recognise the car. He stepped out cautiously. The feeling of being watched had not really gone away. He felt high on nerves and the small jackknife he kept on him was an assuring weight in his pocket.

He walked up the small path and saw Margot waiting outside the house, looking grave and impatient. Will let go of the breath he was holding in. His hand still hovered over the knife in his pocket and he didn't want to think about that particular urge.

"Why are you here?"

Margot turned around quickly, better at keeping her surprise hidden than Will who didn't want to talk to anyone who wasn't Winston. And anyways, he didn't particularly like Margot and he got the vibe that it was the same for her.

Margot smiled at Will that looked a lot like a grimace. Will could understand the sentiment.

"I was in fact waiting for you to show up."

"Me? What do you want from me?"

"Why do you think you have anything that I could possibly want?"

Will shrugged making his way past Margot to open the door and stepped inside. "If you hadn't you wouldn't be here standing in thr flesh would you Margot?"

"Watch how you speak Graham."

"I don't work for you anymore."

"Hmm. Even then you were a nuisance. Things don't change much over time."

"Nor do people. Look, I'm really not in the mood for a pretentious conversation. If you have something to ask then do and leave. Please."

Margot huffed, more amused than affronted. She came inside and hung her coat over by the hangar and walked up to the couch where she took a seat.

"On the contrary Will, I am here to give you an advice. One which you can take or leave as it fits you but I'm about done with the shadow of the debt I owe you looming above my head."

“What debt?” he went to open the door to the staircase room where Winston stayed. He happily clambered out through the door as soon as it was opened and climbed up on Will with his tail stirring up a storm. He barked loudly once at Margot before he shushed him with a quick whistle. Will was lost in his conversation with Winston that he almost missed what Margot said.

“The day you saved me from my brother. You lied for me. You were punished. Surely you remember.”
Will's hands stopped running over Winston’s bead who whined at the loss of attention.

“What?”

Margot looked at Will with an indiscernible look.

“You don’t remember? Huh. Monster does recognise one of its kind. Like calls to like and all that I suppose.”

“Margot, can you please speak plainly.”

Will was taken aback by the look of almost sadness in her features. Margot was always so composed, so aloof. Most of all, he never remembered Margot looking sad on behalf of him.

“You’re a poor mess of a man Will. Like a puppet with loose strings you wander from one crafty hands to another. But that’s not my business and I shall not discuss it with you. However Alana had expressed the same worry about you having supposedly blocked your memories from six years ago. I’ll give you a friendly reminder. Why don’t you take a seat, hmm.”

Will, didn’t, he remained beside Winston who was happy to be near Will after all this time and had promptly nestled himself on his lap, his eyes trained on Margot.

Margot gave an elegant one shoulder shrug. “Suit yourself. Your father was employed by my brother as a security detail on the already inflated team he had sniffing after me all day. He worried if he took his eyes off me for a second longer, I might disappear and he’d be left bereft of his favourite toy to play with. But your father, I suppose he was a good man. As good a man can get who’d willingly choose to work for Mason at least. But he was more understanding of my situation than the rest of the buffoons and he had a hidden streak of odd knowledge stored away behind his gruff demeanour that was marginally better than being bored out of my mind. You used to tag along with your father on some days. Mason didn’t object because you were a pretty little thing. ‘Like a saintly cherub' he’d say. But you were too old for his taste so he left you largely on your own. You hung around your father and so

by proxy, we would sometimes talk. One day, I tried to try out my luck. See how long it took for Mason to realise I had escaped. It was a small window of time, but it was mine. When your father came to collect me and not the usual goons, I knew what my punishment would be. It was coincidentally the day when Mason was throwing a socialite party over some business deal he had secured. So I knew it was going to be public.

"Your father was bound to follow whatever Mason dictated. I didn't want to cause any trouble for him but I… I was afraid. Mason wouldn't normally go so far as to do anything outrageous in public but he had been in a mood and I knew what I did wasn't going to be let off easily. So I ran. I ran to get out of the estate but couldn't. You found me. I told you not to tell Mason where I was, and when he came looking for me outside the maze where I had hidden, you told him you didn't know. But Mason knew I was there, and he knew you were lying on my behalf. So he chose to punish you instead. He called up your father out to the garden and said you had stolen some bogus thing off of him and he demanded you be taught a lesson. Your father was commanded to whip you ten times for the amount of time you had denied of ever doing that thing. People had gathered there but then. Mason could be loud when he wanted to be. You were beaten. Your father had resigned. Shortly after that, Mason decided to go on a trip to Europe. That's the story."

Will had listened with a stone-face acceptance of a truth that was clearly becoming apparent. His memories of this time… Of only this time was gone. It wasn't vague, or broken or hard to recollect. It was as if his memories had been collected in a basket and stowed away. It was deliberate.

"Is that all," he said finally. Margot looked like she wanted to say something but changed her mind. She got up, smoothening out the wrinkles from her dress.

"My advise to you Will is that you should spend some time at your own house. Take a little vacation from all this stuff. Alana is very worried about you. It might help."

She took her coat and was putting it on when Will stopped her. "Why did you come here now? With this… advice?"

She didn't turn back. "Because it's time that we become strangers again Will. To put it bluntly, don't you think it's curious that everyone who gets close to you has disappeared? Have you not wondered why Anthony never showed up here?"

"What do you mean,"

"Goodbye Will. For Alana's sake, I hope you'll stay away from us." And then she was gone.

Will stared after her for what seemed like a small eternity. Flashes of images sunken in light appeared before Will's mind. He looked down at his hand and saw someone else gripping his wrist. There was warmth on his cheek followed by a rushing of water that threatened to overcome him but he squeezed his eyes against the onslaught. He wasn't going to be swept away. Not this time.

By the time he had his breathing in control and there were no more flashing images, Winston had lept off of his lap and was looking at Will expectantly. Will got up, changed his clothes, gave a bowl full of food to Winston. He went to the kitchen and opened the wine cabinet. Took out two bottles, packed some more treats for Winston, and drove out to Wolf Trap.

Winston was insurmountably happy at getting a place to stretch his legs to his heart's content. He was bounding and leaping through the largely overgrown grounds of his property. Will found a smile creeping onto his face as he watched his little buddy enjoying himself untethered. Will looked back at his house and fought the blurry memories of his father stopping him from going inside. Once he was in he realised he didn't know what he was doing. He hadn't told Hannibal he was coming here. He had to go to work an hour from now and he wouldn't be able to make it anyways because it's almost a two and a half hour journey from here.

Will wandered aimlessly through out his home, cleaning up stuff from the well furnished cleaning closet and lost himself to a faintly remembered nostalgia when he found little trinkets around the place. He found some old tickets to Star War movies and Phantom of the Opera movie from a box shoved behind a cabinet in the drawing room. His dad had loved watching movies, something that Will never really found entertaining, but those days were among the few quiet ones where he actually remembered the man. He chuckled when he dug out his old tool box, one that his dad had given to him on a stray thanksgiving evening fashioned after the one he used to keep in the garage. Will was cleaning up the fireplace when he noticed the wall paper behind the mantle chipped and discoloured only in a specific place.

Will put down the rag on the floor and grabbed a screw driver to push the chipped wallpaper away given his almost non-existent nails. The blunt edge of the tool wedged between a gap that had been painted over and he dug around the square piece of a loose brick that Will now remembered having done as an odd whim. He took the piece of brick out and in a messily carved out hole, he found a yellowed sheet of paper.

Will's heart seized before he could hear it pounding against his ear. He took the sheet out with trembling fingers. Winston's loud cheerful yips was incongruous with the sinking dread that filled his heart. He opened the sheet and saw an elegant hand writing which didn't belong to Hannibal.

'Have you ever heard of a Soulmate's Lullaby? Consider this my condolence for your

unfortunate loss Will. I hope we never have to associate with one another again. Hide this where no one would follow you.'

The message was signed off with the initials M.V.

Will turned the paper and suddenly the ground beneath him no longer felt steady. His legs gave out under him and he crashed to the ground.

There on the paper scribbled in his own script were three words that shook something fundamental within him. Just three words that seemed to tug at something inside of him which had been deeply submerged for a really long time.

'Don't trust Lecter'

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Notes

> So..... I'm sorry for not posting. Things were rough. But i did continue to write whenever I could. Between writing my dissertation and dealing with life, I figured out where I want to end this part of the story. It's likely going to have two parts with maybe three or four more chapters. I've written out two chapters already and post them once every two weeks. Hopefully it won't take me forever again to upload. Thank you to all thode who've read and continue to do so. ಥ‿ಥ I really love you guys!!! (^ɜ^)-☆Chu!!(✿ ♥‿♥)

Will sat outside on the porch of the house he had helped his father rebuild. He watched Winston dozing off beside him after spending all his energy leaping and running. Will thought of nothing in particular, except for the fact that Winston's coat had become softer to the touch than it was before. He ran his fingers over the arches of Winston's head, stopping at the bridge of his wet nose. Will tried not to think about anything else. Not about the several calls he had missed from Jack, not about the unanswered messages from Beverley who was supposed to come over for dinner tonight at their house. He didn't want to think about Hannibal and how it was almost becoming a pattern for him.Something outside his control would happen, he'd be unsettled and he'd come running here, then he'd go back to Hannibal and Jack and Alana who claimed to worry about Will, knew what was best for Will : *poor, sad confused* Will who was so gullible. *So easy to manoeuvre*.

There was a sudden noise at a distance. Will raised his head and tried to make out what it was. The noise was coming from somewhere deep inside the woods. Will stared for how long he didn't know until he heard the sound again. Dried leaves and twigs crunching under a boot. Winston sat up straight at the same time Will's body seized. He started barking loudly as Will stood up and tried to get Winston inside the house before he could run towards whoever it was that was watching them. Someone who had followed them here.

Will bolted the door locked and grabbed a butchers knife from the kitchen aisle. He stood holding his breath the knife drawn in front of him. He had switched off the lights and only the light of the stars poured in through the curtained windows. Winston growled steadily looking at the window to his right. Will could hear the beating of his heart like a war drum filling him to the brim with an almost giddy tingling sensation. The moment Winston lurched at the window Will was lunging sideways as from the left window a figure came barrelling in. Broken glass splintered in the obscure light only dimly catching the look of surprise on the assailant's face as Will closed in dodging the sharp glint of a switch blade as it flew past his

head barely missing by an inch and he used the gap to twist the man's arm holding the blade in a move his father had taught him. He pulled until he heard a *crack* and a muffled groan was wrenched from the man who dropped to his knee but tried to use the momentum to bring Will down as well. But Will was quicker, he threw his whole weight into the motion and rolled, throwing the man down on the wooden floor boards with a thud and sat astride his chest. He took the knife in his hand and pointed it right at the man's jugular.

Will panted with the effort but found himself hyperaware. He noticed the man had gone limp underneath him, the broken wrist trapped under the weight of his knee and the other motionless by his side. There was something familiar about the man as he grinned through a bleeding lip.

“Remember me?”

“*What the fuck did you do*!”

The smooth baritone of the voice coupled with a thick Southern accent greeted Hannibal and his unconscious young soulmate after he knocked on the door. It would seem that it just wasn’t the contrast of the man's voice that was interesting about him but how he’d almost instinctively known something was wrong with his son. He didn’t waste any time taking the prone body from his arms and laying him down on the bed of the motel all the while calling his name over and over again. ‘*Will. Will. Willy*.’ Hannibal stood on the threshold watching with curious eyes as the man fussed over him, running his hand through the boy's spindly curls and gripping his pale hands.

The boy, Willy, opened his eyes blearily and tried to sit up.

“Hey, hey, little buddy! Hey, hey. I’m here, I’m here. Willy, Willy what happened?” But the man's words didn’t seem to register because the boy’s eyes wandered around the room restlessly, desperately until they saw Hannibal. The reaction was something he hadn’t anticipated to be so powerful. It was almost like Hannibal could suddenly *hear* what sunlight dancing across the surface of a still and deep lake would be like. A wave of wonder and relief so intense and so overwhelming crashed through the slither of the bond they shared had him take a step back. The man turned his head quickly as if only remembering that a stranger was at the door.

The boy’s cerulean eyes fanned by long dark lashes fluttered and words tumbled out of the chapped lips like a hushed prayer, “You’re here. You’re real.”

The man rounded up on Hannibal his fists balled tight at his sides. “Who are you? And what the hell were you doing with my son?”

A muscle ticked on his forehead. He tried to reign in his impulses which were just boiling underneath his skin, ready to just spring out and render if he so willed. But that was illogical and needless. A lot of people had seen him carrying Will in his arms and into the motel, he even had to speak to the registrar to find out where the both of them were staying since his soulmate was in no shape to even speak comprehensively. The blood on his being had dried and Hannibal had changed his bloodied clothes and replaced them with the spare he always carried: a grey shirt and black trousers both of which hung loosely from the petite frame of the boy. Besides the impulse to sit with the boy and speak for hours on end was only a feeble want the bond tried to generate so that it could become whole. For now he'd let the utter rudeness of the father to slide. But he would not forget.

"I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter. I was passing through the town road when I came across your unconscious son, bleeding profusely in the sidewalk. I had attempted to call the emergency services however your son pleaded me not to, saying it was going to go away – the wounds on his being. And when they did within seconds of me coming across him, I noticed my name written across his wrist."

The sheer devastation that immediately overcame any righteous fury overcast on the man's features was intriguing. The man stumbled, his eyes darting back to his son who was swaying on the bed still looking upon Hannibal as if he was just a spectre - a thing of smoke and imagination.

"What," the man said disbelieving. He turned back and grabbed Will's shoulders and shook him slightly to bring him out of the trance-like state he was in. " Willy? What the hell happened out there? Willy, hey. Come back to me. Willy?" Whatever stupor he had been slowly dissipated as he came to himself blinking rapidly. He took his gaze away from Hannibal, who thoroughly tucked away the nonsensical pang of sullenness , and focused on his father.

"D-dad? Daddy what-"

"Are you alright? What happened? I thought I told you to stay within the motel premises!"

"I-I was just… I saw a bird while I was riding. I thought I'd follow it a bit and then I don't- I just felt so heavy like my limbs just went all numb and…" He looked up through his lashes at Hannibal like a deer caught in the headlights. "I don't remember much. After that I only remember seeing *him*… helping me. And I – I saw *his arm*. Dad. He-"

"Okay. You should-you stay here. I'll arrange for some hot milk alright. You sure you feeling fine? No dizziness or numbness anywhere?"

"No."

"Alright. Alright just… lie back down Willy. I'll step outside with Doctor Lecter here so we can talk and I'll—well. Yes." He nodded to himself resolutely and stood up. He grabbed his wallet and keys from the table by the door and took his jacket. He drew himself up straight staring at Hannibal with a challenge in his eyes.

"Would you mind if we have this talk outside? My son needs rest."

“Dad-“

“It’s perfectly alright. You don’t have to worry Will.”

The boy turned an interesting shade of red, even the tips of his ears flushing. He ducked under the covers and fixed his gaze somewhere behind Hannibal’s head.

“Don’t- uh, just, let’s talk before anything else okay?” the father muttered under his breath and Hannibal tilted his head. He stepped back to give the man space and he closed the door behind him.

The man was obviously little Will's father- his soulmate had taken after his father more in mannerisms than his appearance, though it was quite evident that the healthy curls of brown hair was something he had inherited from his father and how abysmally they were taken care of. The man grunted in lieu of starting the conversation and Hannibal was all too happy to let the man come up with how he wanted to talk about it.

Cursing under his breath the man scratched at his neck- a nervous tick- and grunted, “There’s a bar/breakfast arena here. Do you want to go there to have this conversation?”

“If you would like to have it there I don’t have any problem with it.”

“This not interruptin' your work?”

“I was visiting a friend.”

“Ah,” he looked like he wanted to say something more but thought better of it, briskly turned on his heels and walked towards what must have been the bar. Hannibal surreptitiously glanced down at his watch. It wasn’t even noon. Hannibal followed the man into the bar which was relatively empty and barren. The man behind the bar gave a knowing nod to Will’s father who waved back. He took the seat farthest from the gate and off into the side closer to a wall. Hannibal took his seat opposite to the man politely asking the waiter a glass of water and nothing else. The man across him raised a brow but didn’t comment. After the waiter came back with a tall glass of water and a jug of amber liquid the man gratefully swallowed mouthfuls before he seemingly gathered up the courage to meet his eyes.

“I know what you’re thinkin' but you’re wrong.”

Hannibal simply quirked his lips. “And what do you think that is?”

The man flowered but the effect of it was lost in the completely helpless state he presented himself in.

“That I’m unfit for my son. That I let him get hurt.”

“I am under no such assumptions. Your son is a stranger whom I found in a peculiar condition on the road and wanted to provide the necessary medical attention he needed.”

“You’re a doctor.”

“Of the mind I’m afraid. Though I had studied extensively for few years to become a trauma surgeon, I quickly found healing the mind more fulfilling. And the wounds I had seen on his body were too serious for me to do anything about given that I had no medical supplies and we were outside.”

“Oh don’t give me that good Samaritan bullshit! I’ve seen people more composed and collected than you lose their shit over Will's episodes. I know how gory and bloody it is. He dies when he sees something dead or when it’s about to die near his vicinity. He dies and he lives through it. But you didn’t even look shaken. And you didn’t take him to a hospital. You had the sense to change his and your clothes before you took him here so you knew he wasn’t in immediate danger. You know.”

Ah. Hannibal had been taken by surprise by few people before. It wasn’t easy to unsettle him. But the man sitting before him wasn’t as unassuming as he showed the world, as he seemed to desperately believe. There was something unruly inside him that stared down Hannibal from the depths of his dark eyes. How interesting.

“I do.”

He snorted though it lacked any amusement. He drank down the rest of the jug, wincing as he swallowed harshly.

“He fuckin' prayed to you. Like you were some angel. Every time I’d catch him doin' that all that I could think was ‘god, if you’re really there, don’t let the sonofabitch show up' but then you do. No God here after all.”

“Or perhaps he couldn’t hear you.”

The man clenched his jaw. The thing inside those eyes moved. It snarled at Hannibal in warning.

“I could hear all his lovely prayers. His *incessant* chant of ‘please' would occasionally find me perturbed when I’d try to concentrate on my studies.”

“*You*-“

“I’d take care with the next words you choose to say. Discourtesy is despicable to me.”

The man breathed through his nose. He leaned back against his chair, a small wince of a smile playing on his lips.

“Nah. You’re not collected or composed. You’re hidin'. Underneath all those layers of propriety and elegance and fancy shmick – you’re hidin'. You aren’t acting calm, it’s like you froze your goddamn expression into the neatest and whitest porcelain self and now you’re stuck.”

Hannibal was a man capable of many things. His unyielding patience and serene control were something he had cultivated over many years. But this man – *this rude little despondent man* – he was trying Hannibal’s patience in a way that rattled him. Of course outwardly all that

indicated he was unsettled by the man was the careful smoothening of any remnants of expression. To someone else this wouldn't bode good things for them. But the man only held his gaze and scoffed.

"Listen… I- it's none of my business what you are or aren't. But Will- he's only a child alright. He's just thirteen. I know the kind of laws there are for soulmates. But no matter who you are or what you mean to my son, you're not allowed to take him from me." The man had an odd charm Hannibal quietly mused to himself. The fierce protectiveness that raged behind those not-so present eyes and a sharp perceptive mind that could so easily be disregarded for his foul manners and abysmal drinking habit – this man posed a challenge that Hannibal hadn't come across in quite some time. Hannibal let his professional smile wash across his face, amiable and agreeable.

"Of course. I have no penchant for teenage boys Mr… "

"… Andrew. Andrew Graham."

"Mr Graham. You see, I have my life exactly where I want it. Even though the idea of soulmate is intrepidly romantic I, however, do not find myself in need nor particularly in want for one. It is, of course, of no problem should you ask me to carry out my other responsibilities for your son – something I'm more than comfortable to provide."

"We don't need your money Doctor Lecter. We don't need you at all."

"Curious how confident you are about your son's choice."

"He can make that decision when he's ready. For now, I'm his guardian and he'll do what I say."

"Indeed. But you should be wary of the youth Mr Graham. Their beliefs are so clear to them in this age, untainted from the cynicism adulthood brings forth. I'd imagine his ire is something to behold."

"Don't talk about him like you know anything about him! Listen – are you serious? You are not going to demand to stay in touch with him now or ask to see him unless he expressly wants so? If you're serious then I need it in official paper."

"Quite so. Very well. My lawyer will get in touch with you in the next few days. We can draw up an agreement after we decide the best time for us. This is how you can get in touch with me if you so need."

Andrew took the card reluctantly barely looking down at it before stuffing it in his shirt pocket. He hesitated for a moment before he turned towards Hannibal and spoke as he began to stand. "Why do you not want him?"

Hannibal tilted his head. "Your son is not ready for something like a soulmate bond yet Mr Graham. I leave the choice up to him. Should he desire to look for me, he will know exactly where to find me."

“So will I.” Hannibal smiled at those ominous words. Mr Andrew Graham didn’t disappoint.

“Oh I know.”

“You know it’s strange how quiet you’ve grown ever since Anthony dropped by.”

Margot looked up from her laptop at her wife standing in front of the ceiling to floor window carrying their son on her hip as he babbled happily at Alana.

“What do you mean?”

“I think you know what I mean dear.”

Margot closed the laptop and turned to face them from lounge chair. “He was just an unpleasant surprise Alana. Someone I don’t want around anywhere our family. When he showed up so suddenly, he brought with him memories I’d much rather forget.”

There was a little frown in between her brows – in that adorable way that enhanced her piercing blue eyes into depthless pools. Something fierce and possessive lit up with in her chest every time she looked upon the family she had taken for herself, everything that she stood to lose if she ever were to let her guard down.

“Do you think Mason is trying to make contact with us? Is that why Anthony was here?”

Margot sighed. How keen eyed her mate was! It was a major turn on any other time if it didn’t mean that Alana was starting to notice things she shouldn’t have.

“I don’t think Mason is that much of an idiot. He knows it’s public knowledge the vicious underbelly he kept up underneath the business. Anthony came here because of why he always comes here. He wanted money.”

“Money? Even after the hefty cheque you gave him last year?”

“That’s Anthony for you.”

Alana cooed at Jasper letting him pick up a toy from the other assortment of toys and laid him down on the plush carpet where he began playing with them. She came over to Margot and made space for her wife to settle comfortably down on her lap. Alana smiled gracefully, the plump red of her lips setting her heart thrumming as they leaned down to kiss each other. Margot sighed through their bond as Alana's earthy grounding presence washed over her fretting self, soothing her down until she felt like she was floating under a pleasant summer sun. Alana sneaked in a chaste little peck as they broke apart, Margot laughing and burying her face into the crook of her wife’s neck. She smelled of cinnamon and tart berries.

“Don’t hide from me Margot.” Electric blue eyes peered into Margot's own. Alana’s finger trailed down her cheeks, the points of contact a living thing in their bond. “I don’t need my constitution to know that you’re terrified. Tell me. Don’t hide from me again. Let me help you.”

Margot’s fingers around Alana's hip tightened. “This is something I can’t tell you about Alana. This is not as easy for me to speak of as it was about all the nightmares you save me from. You need to trust me.”

Alana’s frown only deepened. “I do! You know that I do!”

“Then please, trust me Alana. When it becomes pertinent I will tell you everything. Ever since the day you walked inside the manor and chastised Mason in front of everyone you’ve been saving me. And over the years you’ve saved me over and over again – from Mason, from the critics, from myself – and I took everything you gave me and more because I could and because I had never had someone be so kind to me and never once want anything in return. Alana, you’ve never stopped saving me and I love you for that. But this is my turn. Let me do this for you. For Jasper.”

Margot could see from the silent storm in her mate’s eyes that she didn’t want to drop the point. Alana was persistent and more stubborn than she ever was, but she needed for Alana to not go down this line of thought. The less people who knew about the truth the better. And besides, if Alana remained blind to whatever that had happened that day, then Margot could claim her innocence when the day of retribution would arrive. Margot wasn’t a fool to believe that she could ever escape the consequences of her silence.

Alana sighed pursing her lips and threading her fingers through her wife’s hair. She could feel the deep foreboding sense of dread that radiated from Margot in waves. Usually she was more in control of the channel between them but lately she had been so on edge. It had been years since she saw Margot so fidgety and hyper-aware of her surrounding. She’d jump every time there’s a knock on the door or if anyone spoke too loudly or did anything suddenly. Margot was a very private individual and Alana would usually respect that boundary but she was worried for her mate’s wellbeing. She knew she couldn’t get through Margot now. So Alana gave a small smile and leaned down to kiss her, trying to soothe her nerves.

“I love you.”

“And I, you.”

The man's head snapped to the side with the force of his hit, blood spraying across the floor in a glorious arch.

Will shook off the stinging pain radiating upwards from his knuckles. The man below him only snorted through the blood.

“Try again.”

“*Oh Mr Graham*,” He rasped wetly, “You’re a magnificent sight!” Will's fist came down harder than the previous one. The one named Matthew Brown coughed and let out a whimper.

“—lease , pl-please-“

“Tell me who you are and why you’re here.”

The man panted heavily under him. “I-I told y-you. I wanted t-to rob you.”

“Bullshit! You’ve been following me. Ever since that day in the book shop, you were the one who was lurking in the shadows. You knew I didn’t live here. So you followed me from home. I’ll ask you again Matthew. *Why*. *Are*. *You*. *Here*?”

“I can’t s-say Mr Graham. That’d r-ruin all th-the plan.”

“Whose plan?”

Matthew turned to face him his watering bloodshot eyes gleaming with an unholy amusement. He grinned through his bloodied teeth. “Oh, Mr Graham! Don’t you remember Charlie? I’ve always admired you.” He spat out the blood that was filling his mouth. “I always watched you. When y-you visited your Dad on- on the estate. I kn-knew what you w-were. You shone s-so bright. It’s okay, really. You don’t have to remember me. I d-don't even think you knew me then. But I watched you. But then you *killed* Charlie and I knew we were kindred s-spirits!”

Will barrelled into Mathew until the man was limp underneath him. He got off the man and scrambled away his hands slipping in the sticky blood. Winston curiously sniffed along his side but Will was too overwhelmed to pay him any mind. His ears rang and he couldn’t breathe. He clutched at his chest trying to suck in lungful of air but nothing seemed to enter his body. He knew he was having a panic attack. He tried to focus on the wet nose dragging across his skin. He dug the heels of his palm to his chest and counted in his head.

After what felt like an eternity Will could finally breathe. He gasped, clutching Winston’s fur as he whined.

“-s okay. It’s okay, boy. I’m- I’m okay.” He muttered trying to soothe the dog's anxiety. Mathew didn’t stir on the ground though his chest moved. Will let out a sigh of relief and sat there collecting the roiling thoughts each clamouring for his attention.

“I’m okay,” he repeated, for who’s benefit he didn’t quite know. He waited a moment longer before calling her, knowing that she was the only one whom he could trust.

“Beverly, I need you.”

Chapter Sixteen

Will's prone figure appeared more lost beside the half-slouched one of his soulmate. Under the bright white lights of the hospital room Will’s skin looked a deathly shade of pale, so frail as if it would give under the slightest touch. That’s why the single point of contact between the two- where Hannibal’s fingers laced around Will’s- looked both tragic and impossible.

It was weird for Beverly to see both of the men she knew so differently now. It was almost as if she was seeing them for the first time. Like the former shells of what these two men were before this point were strangers whose faces had grown weaker with time. She saw them now and thought of something improbable. Like watching a flash of thunder dancing on the surface of water for a split second. Dr Lecter was so rarely anything but his composed self so seeing him so dishevelled and harried was striking to her. But knowing what Will told her it felt all the more incongruent. She was still looking upon two strangers, and only one of them was more stranger than the other.

She went back to take a seat outside. She thought it best to make her move after all the statements were taken and Brown was safely put behind bars. Jack was still there with a puzzled look on his face, glaring at the pristine walls for some grievous offense. Mostly it was likely due to Will's propensity of beating up other very bad people nearly to death. Well.

“Hey, do you want another cup of coffee?”

“Nah, I’m fine.” Jack pinched his nose to stave off a headache. The paper work was going to be huge. With the headlines Lounds had been running all day, it was a miracle that everyone in the office still had their heads attached.

“Beverly.”

She stopped and turned. “Do you know what Will was doing there at his old house?”

“No.” she said. “All Will said was that he dropped by with Winston to collect some things when he was attacked by Brown.”

Jack stared back impassively. After a moment he released his gaze and Beverly straightened.

“Is that all Sir?”

Jack sighed loudly. “I’m worried about Will. This is one too many times he’s landed his ass into a hospital in the span of few months. He’s grown more distant. I worry that he’s-“ Jack stopped himself from continuing but Beverly knew. She had seen the accusation in Alana's eyes when she was contacted after they couldn’t reach Dr Lecter shortly after she had reached Will. Alana had briefly stopped by, her jaws set and eyes hard. She didn’t speak to Jack but her glare was deafening.

Beverley was altogether too tired to handle anymore emotionally stunted adult men. “Will’s a strong man Jack. He’s just having a rough few weeks. He’ll sort it out.”

“That’s what I’m worried about.”

******

The first thing he saw was ashen blonde hair falling over a face that was deceptively slack. The second thing he saw that he was in the hospital and the wounds on his body had finally scabbed over. Will blinked around the dampness in his eyes. He didn’t remember what he was dreaming about or thinking of. His heart felt leaden. It probably had to do with exhaustion. His eyes drifted towards Hannibal again and he was surprised to see that he was actually asleep there on the recliner. Something twisted inside him and he reached out with his hand that wasn’t held down to trace the lines on Hannibal’s face. He seemed so disarmed. So human.

The movement woke Hannibal upand his maroon eyes widened a fraction before Will was being gathered against a warm chest. Will could hear the uneven thumping of Hannibal’s heart and found himself unable to pull himself away from him.

“Mylimasis! You’re alright. You’re alright.” Was whispered thickly into the matted curls of his hair. Will couldn’t discern if the grave affectation in his voice as he spoke was one of his many meticulously articulated responses he used to keep Will where he was: oblivious and fucking blind.

He cradled Will’s face in his palms, his thumb grazing over the left cheekbone as he bore into Will’s soul.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes,”

“You were unresponsive for four days. Even when your wounds healed, you wouldn’t come back.”

“I’m right here.” He spoke as he saw a vision of dark swarming flies and snow-driven antlers slowly emerged from behind Hannibal. He saw it now for what it was- a culmination of all his nightmares, of the secrets he chose to forget, something akin to the thing he would feel stir restlessly under his skin. It was a darkened stag with raven feathers. It watched Will with knowing eyes and as it crept out of the room its hooves thuded ominously inside Will’s head.

“Is he dead?”

“No. The injuries he suffered were critical but he pulled through.”

A pity. Will turned his face. He laid back down even though his back protested. The hand Hannibal held on to tightened imperceptibly.

“Is Winston okay?”

“He’s making do with the food I make and he suffers through it all valiantly. He’d often take to climb up on the bed to prove his point.” And Will, despite himself, chuckled roughly. He’s chest tightened and he feared tears might spill over now. How terrible it would be. Hannibal slid his fingers through Will’s hair, the perfect picture of loving concern and vulnerability. “He misses you. And so do I.”

Will swallowed around the knot in his throat. He faced Hannibal now. He allowed the tears to spring up. He allowed them to soak through the pillow leaving warm quickly turning cold trail. He looked at his soulmate's eyes and prayed, after a very long time, he prayed that he saw the truth in those bottomless abyss and not just the reverberations of his desperation.

“Will you tell me the truth if I ask you something now?”

His head tilted, the faux concern still in place. “Of course. What is it Will?”

Will uttered the words through the space between his breaths. “Have you ever knowingly hurt me Hannibal? Hurt me in a way that will unmake me?”

A flash of something quick and terrifying glinted across his face. Hannibal made a noise with his tongue as if he was the one hurt by what Will asked him.

“I have not Will. Not to the best of my knowledge.”

Will shattered. He didn’t find the strength in him to articulate anything further. He hummed in his throat and looked away.

“Will?”

“I feel tired. I’d like to leave now.” He answered after a long while. Hannibal’s voice when he spoke was perfectly maudlin. “Alright. I’ll talk to the doctor and come back. You are certain you’re feeling fine.”

Will didn’t reply but he tilted his head slightly. Before leaving Hannibal had held his hand briefly in his, squeezing in reassurance. Will had reciprocated.

Left to his own thoughts Will now wondered how long he had been ignoring every red flag. From the moment they had met Will had always been the one chasing, always running after him and trying to catch up to him, to understand him. Even when he had felt that he had nothing in the world, his heart had whispered Hannibal’s name and he had gone to sleep comforted by that thought. But he had, to a degree, known what Hannibal was doing if not the mechanics of it. He had known in the deepest recesses of his mind that the mind palace Hannibal had helped him build guarded not the most vulnerable parts of him but the secrets he had left inside his mind. Hannibal had a hubris that would rival the gods. So he must have known Will would eventually find out. Will was sure he must have counted on Will finding it out and then let the excitement of the prospect simmer in the back of his mind as his soulmate slowly lost himself. Hannibal, who came from a long line of pedigree and status, from old

money and archaic titles: he had known what it meant, what it did to a soulmate's psyche, knew the consequences. And still went on with it.

What did he imagine Will would do? Did he imagine he would have a complete breakdown and lose himself to his cruel manipulations? Did he think he'd throw a tantrum and forsake Hannibal, eking out the rest of his life with a broken empty heart? Or did he think he'd finally lose it, give in to the darkness that festered inside of him – that he had shared with Hannibal over sparkling drinks and quiet evenings- that he'd kill someone and then it'd be too late for Will to run away because Hannibal would be there to pick up all the pieces wouldn't he. He'd be there just ready to catch Will as he stumbled bright eyed and bloodied hands and he'd soothe him and sort everything out because Will needed him. And then they'd be bound in blood and death. Then… Will would be utterly *his*.

Will closed his eyes. He supposed Hannibal had succeeded in that regard. He had beaten Garrett Jacob Hobbs to death after all. And if what Will knew was true, then he had been under Hannibal's thrall since he came to live with him. How strange it was to feel so bound to something that was supposed to be freeing. During his research he had come across so many accounts of bereft soulmates who spoke so bitterly, some so very hollowly about their connections and try as he may to keep himself detached from overtly empathizing with those circumstances he had never quite succeeded and afterwards he had tried to parse out those sensations from his own because living with Hannibal, being so closed to him had felt nothing less than absolution, like something so effortless. He wondered now if his own feelings about this chain was like theirs: this sensation of wanting to run but being incapable, of itching to get something wrong out from inside if your skin but your nails were not blunt enough.

And Will found it strange how he was more hurt by the idea that Hannibal had lied to him. He had continued to lie to him and even when Will implored him to tell the truth he still chose to lie. It wasn't the betrayal of Will's trust that ached inside his chest but the lies.

Will's eyes lingered on Hannibal as he moved in the room. It stayed fixed on the motions of his hands as they helped him get dressed and supported him. When he leaned down to press his lips against Will he opened his own and let him inside. It left a strange taste in Will's mouth and as Hannibal's eyes shone with a promise of unbridled chaos awaiting their fate, Will felt himself smile. And so the game had begun.

******

Molly's eyes darted pensively from the small notebook the brunette woman scratched her notes on to the woman herself who sat across from her looking like she was not ready for whatever she had been tasked with.

The lovely young woman had introduced herself as Beverly Katz an FBI agent in training. Though she had been perplexed about the FBI showing up on her doorstep early in the morning when she had clarified that she was here on behalf of Will Graham Molly couldn't help but feel a note of apprehension. She had always believed that Will had an exceptional mind and from their brief conversations had realised that he was more sensitive to his

surroundings due to his exceptionality. The concerning discrepancies in his physical and mental responses to the supposedly reciprocated soul bond was odd to say the least but she wasn't seeing Will in her capacity as a psychiatrist dealing with abused and abandoned mated pairs, but as someone who needed a little bit of guidance with the morbid constitution he had inherited.

Seeing Miss Katz fidgeting with her questions had really put Molly on edge.

"How is he? We were supposed to have a final scheduled session but I never heard back from him."

Miss Katz frowned slightly brushing it off with a too easy smile. "He's been through the ringer these past few months. But I think he'll get back on his feet quite soon."

"Oh, yes. I do believe he will." Molly smiled fondly remembering how resilient Will had been in their conversations, how very bold in his willingness to confront uncomfortable topics heads on.

"So what is it that he wanted you to ask from me?" Molly chose not to point out the obvious matter of him not coming here by himself but she didn't think it really was her business. She was sure Miss Katz knew she couldn't share anything Will told her during their sessions and if Will had send her here particularly to talk with her maybe it wasn't anything to do with their Sessions at all.

She cleared her voice before nodding once to herself.

"Will asked me if you could share anything you know about the Soulmate's Lullaby."

Molly's eye went wide and the gasp left her mouth without any warning. It was something she had come across very rarely in her field of work but it wasn't unheard of. Why would Will want to know such a thing? And why didn't he come here himself?

"Dr Hooper?"

Molly blinked and tried to collect her scattered thoughts. "I'm sorry. You caught me by surprise. I can see why you and Will would get along so well. But, erm. The Soulmate's Lullaby is something that's mostly fiction. You'll find references of it dating back to ancient civilizations. The practice of it depends from culture to culture and is variously interpreted under the aegis of religion and politics. But the crux of the matter is that it is essentially a coping mechanism. Or from my researches into older semi-religious texts would point towards that being the case in most situations. People's life expectancy wasn't too great and diseases and wars were rampant. Finding your soulmate was akin to finding your true purpose and it was seen as a tragic loss or even a sin in some cultures to let that bond go rotten."

"Rotten?"

"That's the way most of the olden texts that have survived talk about the loss or the ending of a soul bond. When one or more of the mated pairs die or leave, their bond reacts to that

absence almost vehemently. It's like a living creature that feeds on attention, reciprocation and synergy. When it is off balance the entire system shuts down. As if the bond itself mourns the loss of the soulmate and refuses to live anymore. It slowly dies, shrivelling into a husk until it no longer remains something tangible. But it has been described as something putrid. Like an appendage that has rotted but is still attached to you and you carry its stench unto death."

"That's fucking dramatic."

Molly chuckled surprised. "Yes! Yes it is. Or it has been said so. Eventually over the years they came up with a mechanism that made it easier to either deal with the loss or to keep it alive through strong suggestions. It's said that the bond is like a blob of clay. However you choose to mold it, it takes after that shape. So before soldiers or people of importance would go out to war or a plague might break out, they'd use that bond and shape it into something that forever remained ingrained into the psyche of the other half. Through words of suggestions and assurances, they would almost have the other end of the bond believe that nothing had changed and that everything was normal. Even if the person died the one who survived would not completely crumble. The bond would be lulled into thinking their soulmate was still alive and hale if not too far away. It kept people alive and functioning. This was supposedly practiced in the Royal and affluent households of South and South East Asian countries with varying degree of success. Most of the stories about the Lullaby are myths. Some just fanciful reimagining of real life events immortalised in poetries. But that's all that they were supposed to be. Fairy tales."

"What do you mean?"

"During the colonial expansion of the British Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new form was spoken of. Rumours mostly. Recorded to have been practiced in certain high profile cases. But not as a coping mechanism but as a manipulation tactics."

Miss Katz face went blank. She stared unfocused at the notebook gripped tightly in her hands.

"How far would the manipulation go Doctor?"

"Oh it can't be said for certain!" Molly mumbled slightly distressed. "In all the books I've come across talking about these colonial sources most of them are from hack practitioners or men suffering from grandiose illusions. There's no authentic or even corroborative sources on the degree of the manipulations. Nowadays, the Soulmate's Lullaby is just a cautionary tale of how all-encompassing soul bonds could be and to always draw clear and mutually agreed upon boundaries so as to not lose oneself to it."

"Tell me doctor. Hypothetically. Is it possible for one of the pair to use this soul bond in real life to suggest the other one the need to forget traumatizing events for the sake of their wellbeing? Is it possible at all that this same suggestion can be used to alter certain perceptions of events, override certain senses and completely shelve certain memories for the suggested benefits of the other person in the bond?"

Molly's dread only grew. "Things like that aren't really possible-"

“Please doctor. Hypothetically speaking is it possible for manipulation and gas lighting of such severe extent amongst mated bonds?”

“If the external circumstances are just as ill conducive to stability as internal conditions and if the person being suggested is under extreme duress or in a situation completely or exponentially out of their control then yes. Yes, hypothetically speaking it is possible. But you must understand that something like this is so very unlikely amidst mated bonds. This practice is just a taboo mostly.”

“But the highest rate of violence between couples are amongst soul bonded pairs.”

“True. Such strong feelings always lead to strong responses. But to use the Lullaby even if it’s possible it would require a finesse and sadism to such a sophisticated degree that it’s almost rare and the other person needs to be under extreme mental duress for the suggestions to take hold. It can even do irreversible damage to the victim’s brain. Completely rewrite their personalities or even risk losing them inside the cage of their minds forever! It’s just… so inhumane!”

“How would one understand that something like this is happening to them?”

“I don’t think- I mean, I don’t- I think it’d be very hard to even allow yourself to be open to the possibility that your soul mate might be exploiting you in such an intimate way. However I think there could be certain triggers – like words, or phrases, pulsing lights or even touches that help induce that vulnerable mindspace and if the victim is already questioning certain absences in their recollection, or erratic emotional responses or attachment issues that are not a result of something physiological… then perhaps… however, I really can’t say for sure. But tell me Agent Katz. Is this something for Will's research?”

“Something like that doctor. Thank you for your time and entertaining these questions. I must take my leave now.”

“Okay. But ah, Agent Katz. If… if it’s about Will. Please let him know that what he knows in the deepest of his heart about this… that is the truth. To hold on to it and not doubt it. Not even for a moment. Please. Help him, if it’s- if it’s about him.”

The agent paused but then saw herself out of her home. Molly had a real bad feeling about all of this.

******

Returning home was a stilted affair. Hannibal didn’t force small talk on him and Will was grateful for that. At the hospital Jack had been strangely reserved as well. He didn’t push him as much as he would like. Beverly had texted him that she’d meet him for coffee in the evening. Will didn’t think going back to his old workplace was of any use. He was already probably fired.

Seeing Winston again cheered up his mood considerably. Will chose not to hide inside his room and instead sprawled across the couch in the sitting room, cuddling Winston as he did. Hannibal watched with a dry amused curl of his lips. His stance was relaxed if not a little tired. But his eyes were cold.

“Dr Chilton had invited me to his office yesterday evening. It seems that a psychological evaluation was requested of of you. In order to get the clearance to work for Jack.”

“I don’t think I’m the right sort of guy for that anymore Hannibal.”

No trace of confusion was visible in those shrewd eyes as they peered into his soul.

“Why so?”

“There’s too much of something else inside here,” he pointed to his temple with one hand as the other carded through Winston’s fur. “And nearly not enough space for other minds that barge into my head as soon as I open the gates. Too many mirror neurons to make drawing lines possible. Not when the tides are so adamant to erase any and all that I might try to carve out anyways.”

“Is this about Hobbs?”

Will laughed but it was a miserable sound. He felt so old. Too old.

“Everything is about him. All of this… it began with him. Before, I could open the window, draw back the curtain and take a peak into what lurked outside. Assured in the thought that I was safe inside the house. But Hobbs showed me how foolish I was being. That I was never inside the house at all. Just watched everything from behind the veil and now that has dropped. I don’t want to be my mind's slave.”

Hannibal was preternaturally still at the side of the staircase. “Your mind is singular in that it perceives everything around without the added facades layered on to it. Free from any distractions, free from any contortions. Your mind perceives a brand of honesty that’s too bitter and discomforting to acknowledge. As overwhelming that experience had been Will, you’ve never lost yourself to it. It’s not your mind that beholds you.”

Will reached a hand out to Hannibal, his chest swelling with something unnameable.

“I need you.”

The air shifted. Hannibal grew more still.

“I am here Will.”

“You’re too far away. Will you come here,”

It wasn’t a question so he didn’t expect an answer. Hannibal’s light footsteps were enough of an answer. He laced his long elegant fingers around Will's slender ones. Will led him around so he sat down in the place where Winston was previously napping. The dog happily strolled out of the sitting room no doubt trying to scratch the glass door to the backyard open. Will

brushed his bruised knuckles across the other man's cheek, feeling the start of scratchy stubble as the pad of his thumb grazed down the lines, ending near the corner of his lips. Will took his fill: watched how Hannibal's eyes were narrowed in contemplation, watched the delicate span of the man's lashes casting a shadow over the edges of his cheekbones, watched how those delectable lips were softly parted, a silver of those unevenly sharp teeth peeking. He was so beautiful. So achingly beautiful.

"I wouldn't know- I wouldn't know who I would be if I didn't have you beside me." Will whispered the quiet admission. The truth shining valiantly between the darkness. Hannibal made a short sound of surprise, a breath too quickly inhaled. That was the thing with him wasn't it. Hannibal was always expecting honesty from Will and yet was always taken aback when he was being honest.

Will pressed his lips firmly against Hannibal's before he could speak. The wave of relief that washed him down through the bond assailed his mind. Something somewhere inside there shook. The shelves scattered to the ground. He pressed himself more into Hannibal and he let him in. The more that Hannibal gave him: opened his mouth and let him be sucked inside Will who was starving, starving as his fingertips pressed dents onto Hannibal's chin and hair, the more Wil wanted to disappear. He didn't want to see the shadow of something emerging from the fallen debris of his shelves – something swarming and inky, talk and grotesque and familiar. As Will straddled Hannibal on the couch, the heat of his body a welcoming reprieve to his cold burning Will wanted to melt down into Hannibal. He wanted to pour himself into Hannibal until he was so full of Will, so stuffed off of him. Will moaned and his hand slid down from where he was gripping Hannibal's jaw to around his throat. He splayed those fingers around the heated expanse of the skin. He had to draw away from Hannibal who watched him with darkening eyes. He waited for Will to speak.

"I have become your creation. You've made me Hannibal. How does that make you feel?"

Hannibal frowned. "Will-"

Will tightened his grip, watched how the skin around his fingers became white the more he squeezed. Hannibal's hands had reached his hips and his fingers twitched as he tried to shift under him, not to push him away but to bring them closer. Hannibal was straining in the cotton fabric of his dark pants and Will felt wanton, unruly, out of control.

Hannibal stares into his eyes as he slowly, ever so slowly brought himself down over the hardened line of his trousers. The contact sent a shiver down his spine and his fingers squeezed harder. A soft gush of breath left Hannibal's parted lips and his hands painfully gripped Will's hips rocking him over Hannibal as he tried to buck under Will. He closed his eyes as the short huffs of breath turned into breathy gasps, Hannibal's dulcet voice giving it a more earthly sound that ricochet inside Will's abdomen as heat pooled inside him. He moved on top of Hannibal like a man possessed. He blindly reached for the buckled, hurriedly opening it and pulling down the zipper as his body continued to move out of his conscious effort. As soon as he had freed Hannibal, he pulled his cock out of the shorts he was wearing and held them both in his hand. The slide of slick skin on skin against his dry palm was tantalisingly sweet, made heavenly as Hannibal gasped out his name in a stilted prayer. Will moved and bucked, he writhed and thrashed uncontrollably trying to lose himself, blind

himself to the truth of a monster made of bones and ink, its horns twisting and twirling upwards into the vast nothingness as it became more clearer.

“Hannibal,” Will moaned as he spilled all over them, shuddering and clutching at Hannibal hoping that he’d be there to catch him when he fell. He would fall. He was. Strong arms wrapped around Will and brought him closer to Hannibal. Will's face was pressed wetly in the hollow of Hannibal's clavicles, all he could smell and taste was the man, what they had done. But Hannibal cooed softly in his ears and for a brief moment Will was confused before he realised that he was crying. Sobbing into Hannibal as he gripped him tightly as though trying to remain together. He was splintering. He had been for so long.

“It’s alright. It’s okay Will. You’re okay. You’re with me. You’re safe.”

“Hannibal?” he gasped.

“Yes my love?”

“Don’t… don’t let me go.”

Hannibal turned his head so he could kiss Will’s clammy forehead. “I’ll never let you go.”

Will shuddered feeling as though he was close to bursting. He clutched at Hannibal’s broad shoulder to support himself when long fingers trailed a curious pattern at the back of his neck. A warm hand gripped the mark on his hand where it blazed and suddenly the sound of waves crashing against the shore engulfed him, the spectre of the horned man fading fast from his eyes.

Hannibal caressed the wet cheeks softly. He murmured assurance in his native tongue until Will's body had become pliant. He pulled the lids away and found those blue eyes murky.

“Will do you hear me?”

“… it’s too loud… “

“What is, loud? Can you describe it to me Will?”

He mumbled something incoherent. His breathing picked up and tears rolled down his cheeks. Hannibal brushed them away tenderly.

“Will, tell me what is so loud.”

“… it’s the horses. They’re- they’re so scared.”

A flashback. That hadn’t happen in a while. Hannibal slowly moved Will so he was pressed along Hannibal’s side. He wrapped his arms around the trembling figure.

“Why are the horses scared.”

“I don’t- I don’t-“ Will gasped. “no… *no please*. Dad, don’t.”

“Who else is there with you Will.”

“It’s Dad. He’s… he’s angry. I didn’t listen to him. The horses won’t settle. They’re-“ Will sobbed. “They’ll find us we’re hiding here.”

“And why are they angry. What did you do. Will.”

“*No, no, no. I can’t. I’m sorry, I’m sorry*.”

“Will. It’s okay. You’re no longer in that barn. You are on a shore. You can see the Sundays glittering on sand. You can see the waters. Do you see them Will?”

“…yes.”

“What is the water doing Will?”

“It’s rising up, up, up.”

“Let yourself welcome the rising tides my dear. Calm your heart. Steady your breaths. Is the water over you now?”

“… yes.”

“Good. Breathe in. As you do you will not feel the water rushing in, there is only crisp air filling your lungs. Breathe out now. Slowly. Yes. Will, open your eyes.”

Will let out a shuddering breath. “*Dad*,” he whimpered. “Why’s… why am I holding a gun?”

“What do you see?”

“I s-see… Dad. Dad lying on the floor. There’s-there's so much blood. Dad! Dad please! Please, please no. Oh god! No! Dad. Dad wake up! I didn’t mean to! I didn’t mean to, I’m sorry! Dad please!”

“What have you done Will?”

“I killed him! I killed him! ***I killed him***!”

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Notes

Hello!!!
🌼❤Happy Pride Month!!!🌟✨
This is the first year where I'm out as a genderqueer nugget so I am celebrating this by uploading this chapter and obsessing over Obi-Wan and Anakin and Loki--- just... The ships have overtaken my life.
I hope you guys enjoy this one. I've finally reached the end, the penultimate chapter is being written and I know where I want to end this story. It might not be the ending you or even 'I' was really hoping for but it's one that fits this phase of Hannibal's and Will's story. I will write a second part to this but that will take some time and I want to start posting that one after I'm done with a considerable chunk of it.
Anyways, this has been one of the many great experiences on this site and I am tremendously grateful to every one of you who have read, commented, kudosed and bookmarked my story. Thank you for being with me!❤
(The next chapter will be up either at the end of the month or the next month!!)

Hannibal watched, a frown marring his otherwise placid face as Will broke down on the sofa, curling into himself and sobbing. It was a long time since this memory came to haunt Will. He remembered this night well. It was a very instrumental day and Will had ended up with him by the end of the night all on his own. He was a glorious sight to behold : all wild eyed and flushed with life, his cerulean eyes almost as dark as the night outside with tears streaming down his face and the gun shaking in his trembling hands. On the behest of Margot, he had done her a little favour if only because she had sacrificed her child for Will. It took him longer to dispatch Mason than what he had anticipated. Mason was way too much fond of monologues and Hannibal would have otherwise been interested to play with him before he did the world a favour but he was short on time. Alana had come running to him in the party saying how Mason had lost his mind and was beating a young child black and blue in the courtyard. The party-goers were none the wiser, the socialites all busy licking each other’s boots than to pay any heed where the host had disappeared to. Hannibal would have let Alana handle the situation if it weren’t for the fact that Will's father was employed here and was the reason Margot had gotten Mason in such a bad strop.

When he had reached the courtyard the spectacle was nearly done. Will was unconscious and was being carried off by his father as Mason stood there red faced and spluttering. Margot was trying to calm him down and Hannibal politely asked the guests who had gathered outside to get back to the party. He heard Mason raising his hand on Margot and the sound of it was distastefully abhorrent to him. He turned around still not having made up his mind

completely about how this evening was going to turn out when Margot caught his eyes, her eyes full of rage and her lips twisted into a snarl, the bruise a deep red at the corner of her mouth. Hannibal distantly felt a pang inside of him.

“Please,” she had said over Mason's shoulder. “*Help me*.”

As Mason mocked her for begging for help from a stranger, a ‘eccentric shrink’, Hannibal had had enough. He helped her the way she couldn’t help herself. And after it was done, he had left her dear brother in her care. “Are you participating or observing Margot?”

She had looked very much like a pearl draped in blood as she had replied her voice steady. “Participating.”

He had left her to manage everything afterwards, more concerned with finding out where his dear Will had disappeared to. He knew Mason had sent his men after Will's father. They couldn’t have escaped the estate on foot on their own when he heard a gunshot ringing out from one of the stables. The further he walked the more bodies he saw on the ground riddled with bullets. Sidestepping the carnage he approached the gate of the stable and stopped. Inside, he had seen his little soulmate clutching a gun that pointed towards where his father must have been standing who was now on the floor quickly bleeding out. There was another man who was standing beside Andrew who charged at Will. Hannibal moved quickly and took him out in seconds before he could even touch Will. He seemed to be in shock, still holding on to the gun and mumbling to himself. Hannibal slowly touched Will's hand and when he didn’t react, ran his fingers over the mark on the wrist and pushed a wave of calmness through it. Will had gasped, his fingers loosening around the trigger and he crumpled. Hannibal caught him and the gun, pocketing the latter and sitting the former down on the ground away from Andrew's body.

Hannibal got back up and went over to Andrew. The man was drawing his last breaths, his hand shooting out and grabbing the end of his pants. Hannibal tilted his head studying the dying man. He was trying to speak something but no sound emerged other than the wet rasping of blood quickly filling the lungs. Hannibal crouched low and watched impassively until the man below him stopped moving. Those dark eyes stilled unseeing and Hannibal reached out to trace the curve of the man's bearded jaw. Such a waste of pure potential. As he was about to get up a strange thought had seized him. The man was wearing a long-sleeved leather jacket. In their short time of familiarity, he had never seen the man without any. He picked up his left arm and pulled back the sleeve. There on the underside of his wrist was the name of his soulmate scrawled out messily, overrun with long-faded scars that had healed over the mottled skin, the name dauntingly clear. His eyes had flicked up at where the boy sat, watching with horror frozen on his face.

“*D-dad… Dad*?” he had trembled quietly. The poor boy was at his limits. He wanted to push him then, see him fall over the edge and wonder how beautifully the boy would break. He wanted to but the strange pull from his bond blared white inside of him. He squeezed his eyes at the onslaught of every emotion that Will was experiencing and yelling them out into their frayed bond. Hannibal wished nothing more than hoping its already tenuous stretch would rip open, freeing him. But it held strong. He got up finally and offered Will his hand.

“Will.” The boy had tilted his chin up automatically, his eyes unfocused.

“Take my hand, little one.”

“B-but he, he is not-“

“*Shh, shh*. I’ll make everything alright. Just give me your hand. Your left one.”

Will reached out. Hannibal caught him and pulled him up. He had stared deep into those endless blue eyes and allowed his end of the bond to slowly open. Every thought and feeling he had ever had were raging in a storm inside there. Will gasped as the bond thrummed. Hannibal closed his eyes and tried to see Will inside the bond that flowed around him like a river of thousand flashing colours rushing past him. There he saw something simmering at the edge. It felt whimsical. Melancholic and earthy. It felt like it was in pain. Hannibal opened his arms inside the bond and met the bubbling spray of feathery darkness that poured out from Will and into Hannibal. He took it all in. And he saw what was inside Will. A magnificent creature of dark and light, like an elk that watched over ancient woods mysterious and powerful. Hannibal felt awe for the second time in his life.

Outside he caressed Will's cheeks and leaned in, his other hand pressing down on the mark. “Let me guide you into the stream, my dear Will. You Will forget the pain and loss you suffered tonight. Pour all of those emotions into the stream as it flows by carrying everything you don’t want to remember with it, far, far away from you. Let the stream come to you my dear. I will be there when you sink.”

****

“… *him! I killed him*!” the record ended.

Beverley was sat there looking horrified at the implications, about how this record was made and why. She couldn’t understand. She didn’t want to believe that Dr Lecter was capable of hurting her friend, his *fucking soulmate* in such a way. They had been so perfect to her, understanding each other and holding so much respect for one another. They moved so comfortably that it seemed that relationship was an easy thing between them, even when she knew it was far from the truth and they had their own ups and downs. But she had never imagined that Hannibal would hurt Will in this way, would violate him in this way. He was so uncharacteristically…calm about everything. She expected him to rage, she expected him to break at least a single bone of Dr Lecter's face but Will was like calm deep water. He heard every single recording he had made in the past week with a straight face and calculation in his eyes. Beverley felt something wrong settling inside her.

“I think we should take this to Alana.” Beverley said finally. “She will believe us and will help us out! Or we can go to Molly as well. Will, you have to tell someone about this.”

Will tilted his head to the side. “Hannibal knew I’d figure it out. He counted on it.”

Beverley blinked. “What do you mean?”

Will had a distant look in his eyes as he stared out of the window of the cafe shop. “When Dad brought me to Hannibal to deal with my increasingly disturbing bouts of nightmares and panic attacks, during those initial sessions where he was my psychiatrist for a few months…

he'd help me create a controlled space in my head where I could safely regulate and store memories or experiences. A mnemonic device. We'd talk for hours on length about Greek mythology and arrogant gods. He'd never outright ask me about what I dreamt, but soothed me through the conversations of morality and integrity until I was relaxed enough for him to slither inside my mind. He said I could make it anything in the world. Whatever I found easy to visualise and remember. I had trouble focusing on anything and was almost always ready to bolt at the slightest jump. There is a big shelf in his office filled with precious and antique books. When I wouldn't be pacing around the office trying to steady myself by touching the surfaces of that shelf, I'd stare at it noticing how a particular book was moved from its original place. Shifted incrementally. No one would notice it really. But I did. And he knew I did because every time I came to him for the sessions I'd see that he had moved few books from their places. It was a little game we played. He never acknowledged it outright and I never commented. I'd simply walk up and rearrange those books as I had seen them previously. It… it grounded me. Helped me know that I was awake and not dreaming."

Beverley's frown deepened. "So you're saying that Hannibal used soulmate magic voodoo on you to protect you from the knowledge that you had inadvertently killed your father knowing that you would eventually figure it out? Is that what you're saying?"

Will found his way back to himself and blinked. He took a sip from the coffee they're drinking and grimaced at its horrible taste. Beverley caught the look and rolled her eyes. "Will. What are you planning?"

"I-there is something I still have to know. I have to wait for it. I will complete my masters and I'll help Jack catch the new killer. But after that…I still don't know. As for my relationship with Hannibal… there are answers I want from him. But I know he expects me to get them on my own."

"Well, fuck what he expects and fuck *him* altogether Will! We have to report it to someone! It's a gross violation of someone's privacy!"

Will wanted to smile at her protectiveness, at her anger on his behalf. "I'm afraid there aren't any laws or rights giving that sort of space to soulmate pairs. And even if there were any loopholes to the existing system, the Soulmate's Lullaby is an urban legend at best. There is no concrete way to prove it which can't be overridden by stating the need to protect one's bonded and for self-preservation."

"The only thing he was preserving you from was the truth. We can at least file him for psychological harassment-"

"I don't want this to be dragged to court Bev. What he did was personal. I don't-I won't have myself be so vulnerable in front of so many strangers who have nothing to do with me or him."

"What are you going to do?"

Will smiled that was more grimace than anything, a broken sad thing. "A quid pro quo."

******

“Well. This is unexpected.”

Chilton sat leisurely in his too big and stuffy seat, looking smug and curious at the same time. He was grinning up at Will who refused to look at him for any longer than a second and was rather pouring over the notice that was sent to him by Purnell.

“Dr Lecter had informed me that you weren’t coming for our scheduled meeting Mister Graham. He said that you were no longer interested in being good old Crawford’s pet. What changed?”

Such a sloppy way to get a rise out of him. Will could bang his head to the shiny desk. His or that of Chilton's. He assumed he’d be much relieved if it were the latter's. “I want to help Jack close the current case.”

Chilton leaned in, his eyes glinting. “How kind of you Mister Graham. Honestly. Lounds called you a martyr in one of her recent articles. Did you know that? She called you a martyr because through reliving the pain and anguish of the victims before their death you purge your other dark impulses that would have otherwise find you in quite a messy situation. How does that make you feel?”

“Disinterested. Dr Chilton, I’m here to provide you with an opportunity. But if you’re so entertained by mindless speculation and tabloid journalism then I think you won’t want to hear what I have to say.” Will made to get up but Chilton grabbed his hand, or tried to because Will was way faster than he could ever be and stared at the man affronted through his glasses.

“Ah. Sorry, sorry. Dangers of occupation I’m afraid. Please Mister Graham, be seated. I’m eager to know about this… opportunity you speak of.”

Will sat back down a little stiffer than before. “I will attend the mandated four sessions with you Dr Chilton. You will find me suitable for the job I’m assigned. And after that, we can continue to meet for extended sessions off the records that you might use for academic purpose posthumously. But in those extended sessions, I want you to help me recover certain things in exchange of the information you will gain from me.”

Chilton was taken aback evident from his slack jaw and round eyes. He frowned, scratching at his chin. “Recover?”

“It is likely I’m suffering PTSD, Dr Chilton. There are chunks of memories that I’ve lost or simply forgotten. I want you to help me recover them.”

“Oh. Well, as interesting as this prospect is Mr Graham I can’t help but notice your unsaid need to keep these sessions undercover. From both Crawford and Dr Lecter.”

“ Yes. You agree?”

“Hmm. This is an unique opportunity of course. Someone as bright and intelligent as you are surely realise what analysing your thoughts and personality can mean for the academic circle. But since you’ve come to me and not to Dr Bloom, I can only assume you do this because you know I have no vested interests in you outside of the realm of professionalism.” The man smirked, believing to have cracked some code that Will was trying to hide. He didn’t respond for his own wellbeing.

But Chilton was undeterred. He continued like Will had agreed on his assessment. “I know this because Dr Lecter and Dr Bloom have been so overtly protective of you since your existence became common knowledge in the psychiatric world. They coddled you too much, I had expressed so before but they had different opinions. No matter. You had come here asking for my guidance, but know that you already had it before. Your memories are something you’re not too fond of finding out and certainly don’t want your soulmate knowing. It does make me so curious Mr Graham.”

“Dr Chilton.”

“Ah, apologies. Of course, I agree. Why don’t we do a session right now if you’re amenable to that?”

Will nodded. “Just one more thing. I don’t want you to record these sessions. They have to be had in complete privacy. You will have your notes and that’s more than enough.”

Chilton opened his mouth to argue but Will shot him down. “It’s that or I walk out of here.”

Chilton looked like he wanted to press on the matter further but wisely kept silent. Will felt himself relax and willed himself for the first session. It was going to be a long day.

****

Beverly poured over every evidence, every reported sightings, every reported cases that she had on the Il Monstro and the Chesapeake Ripper. She laid the photos of the crimes scenes together and studied them extensively for hours. She went over all the details she had been able to gather and sat in her study with dread steadily rising in her guts.

The inspirations for each of these murders were similar. The strokes of cruelty inflicted, the controlled violence of the mutilations, the peculiar brand of sadism that was reflected… it all *felt* hauntingly similar. Where the murders in Florence looked a little impassioned, more ruthless and less about theatrics, those committed by the Ripper was more refined and distinctively ostentatious. The Ripper had perfected his craft of turning blood and violence into morbid pieces of art made for the audience of one : himself. She had also dug up an old article where the chief investigator in the Florentine murders was reportedly hounding a witness on the University campus, someone he believed had something to do with those murders. The identity of that student was not revealed in the article and she had found only a handful of other articles talking about this incident but almost all of them had made it a point that the student's interest in the very same paintings that were replicated in the murders that was observed by other witnesses and for the fact that he was medical student studying to be a surgeon made it all the more ominous. Pazzi hadn’t returned her mails but that was okay, she’d figure it out on her own.

The more he looked at those pictures and case files the more a scenario began to take shape.

She looked at Lecter's timeline of him arriving at Baltimore from Florence. The Florentine murders stopped several months before Lecter flew out. The first reported and confirmed Ripper murder happened roughly two years after Lecter started his residency here. She remembered Will's profile of the Ripper. She also remembered how the recent kill had a distinct motive. A letter it might have been if Will were to be believed. And Beverly trusted him whole heartedly.

She needed more answers. She couldn't take this to Will now. He was already going though so much. But she needed to know, needed to follow through this hunch. She called Jack with her heart beating erratically. She was going to save Will Graham if no one else would. Even if Jack didn't believe her about this, after she was done with her questioning of Lecter, she would tell Will. And Beverly knew he would believe her. She wasn't going to let her best friend be all alone amidst all of this evil.

"There is something I need to tell you."

****

There was another gruesome kill. Jack's questioning of all the finest instrument makers in Baltimore and adjacent areas had yielded no results. Even the prime suspect who has suspicious alibi – A Tobias Budge, was hard to pin down, the man never speaking any word without his lawyer present. It made things a little tricky for Jack but he was never a man to let bureaucracy hold him back from putting bad criminals into jail. He was betting on the element of surprise and as soon as Chilton had ringed him up saying they had successfully covered the first of the four scheduled sessions with Will, Jack jumped on the opportunity. Will was close to submitting his thesis and Jack had given him ample time to recover from Brown and work on his paper before he whisked him away with him to Quantico. That was another annoying piece of puzzle in the grand maze of why everything seemed to end up in disasters for Will Graham. That boy hadn't had a normal day since his Dad brought him here. Jack would feel a tinge of sympathy for the young man already looking worse for wear and ragged if he didn't have a psychopath running loose. As far as they could tell, Brown was a case of stalker obsessed with Will while he was working at that ancient bookshop.

Jack quickly briefed Will in on the information they had gathered in the meantime and instructed him that he was to go to Tobias Budge's music shop accompanied by three agents. In no uncertain terms did Jack make it clear that Will was not to engage physically with the suspect. He was just being sent in to rattle the man, to set him on edge. Will was simply to observe, talk with the man and give him a profile as his agents would wait in the car outside and if something were to go wrong, Will would signal to them and they'd come in. It was a simple plan, a good one. Tobias Budge had no reason to suspect Will. For all he knew, Will was an agent, and was there on behalf of Jack. It was standard procedure. He was called into the station for questioning a week prior, and the FBI wanted to ask further questions. This was a routine. It wasn't supposed to go wrong.

But Jack should've known by now that the fates hated Will Graham with a passion.

So of course everything went south the moment Will had walked into the music shop and announced himself. The place was neat. Overly so. Will glanced around and rubbed his finger along the hanging shelves on the walls but there was not a smidge of dirt. He perused thought the instruments, even trying out few keys on the piano displayed at the parlour to see if he remembered his mother's lessons from childhood. The notes filled the space and Will waited for Mr Budge to show up. But he never did. Will wandered further inside the shop, coming across a 'do not enter' sign and knocked a few times on the door. When no answer came forward he turned the knob and stepped inside. It was a workshop, with equipment of many kind orderly arranged. The smell of harsh chemicals and bleach was rampant and he could see atop a steel counter a plop of something poking out half out of the bowl. Will cautiously moved ahead. They had given him a taser gun for emergency so he brought that out and held it in front of him. As he approached the mass on the table it became obvious that it was guts. But they did not resemble cat guts. Or of any animal's. Will watched the droplets of water mixing with swirls of red trailing down the counter and disappearing into a small puddle on the tile floor. His finger slowly moved towards the button of the taser as he noted the counter still wet.

He saw movement in his periphery a second too late and something hard hit him at the back of his head. He grunted, pain shooting out in leaps and bound and he uncoordinatedly shambled away from Budge who was holding a tapered instrument in his hand. He had a strange look in his eyes, one that of familiarity and… envy.

Things finally clicked in to place. Now he knew why that face had looked familiar when Jack showed him his picture. And who he was serenading.

"I didn't expect to meet you here Mr Graham. You're a long way from home."

Will didn't take his eyes off of the man as he prowled him in a circle. Will knew there wasn't any sharp objects in the room. Even if Budge had been taken by surprise he still had time to hide away all possible objects that could be used as weapon Will had to be smart about this.

"Duty called Mr Budge. Truth be told, I had nearly forgotten you."

Budge smirked slowly. He threw away the object he had been holding carelessly over his shoulder. He was arrogant enough to think he could take on Will.

"It can happen when one doesn't know to recognise a diamond from a cheap imitation. It requires skill and years to hone such perception. One as… ordinary as you lacks the vision. It's of course of no fault to you. Bad genes, is at fault."

"I don't think you just want to be a pretty stone on top of a ring that people gawk at. You want to be remembered. To be the best at what you do."

Budge waved his hand around, with an indulgent smile on his face. "And what is it?"

"Creating art." Will said, dropping his eyes and stumbling.

Budge, of course fell for it. He quickly brought out a cord and lunged at Will who waited until Budge was right where he needed him to be before springing up and knocking his head

into Budge's with a resounding snap. The other man groaned and Will quickly manoeuvred Budge into a chokehold with one arm as he tried to taser him with the other. The other man convulsed but he had more endurance than what Will had thought of and he was able to shake Will's hold off of him and throw him across the room and into another counter.

Will tried to pull up his feet but he found it hard to even take a single breath. Budge was shaking off the current on the other side and Will took this opportunity to grab hold of the instrument Budge had previously thrown to the ground and charged at him. He brought it down repeatedly over Budge's head while man tried to block it with his arms. The taser had fallen away when he had been thrown across the room and the only chance he had to escape here alive was if Budge was completely incapacitated. When Budge was no longer moving Will took a step back, his breathing hard and spots dancing across his eyes. He fumbled for his pocket and took out the phone. He was about to call Jack when the world tilted and he was suddenly on the cold hard floor with Budget on top of him wrapping the cord around his neck and pulling.

Either it was the commotion or Will taking so long that might have alerted the agents waiting outside who entered the shop as it chimed and called out.

Will clawed at Budge's face, digging his thumb into the man's eyes as he bucked underneath wildly. But the throbbing at the back of his head coupled with the choking was making it harder and harder for Will to remain conscious. He floundered for something within his reach as the men outside the door cautioned for Budge to raise his hands and stand away from the door. Budge was intent on killing him but that wasn't what Will had planned for himself. He took hold of something that had fallen in the chaos and without much thought brought it down as hard as he could to the side of Budge's temple.

The hold on the cord loosened and Will gasped, rolling away from Budge where he had fallen clutching his head, and a small bloodied plastic tray lay discarded on the floor.

"He's here! He's unarmed!" Will croaked out, trying to be loud enough for the agents to hear.

Budge let out a pained sound and Will turned to see him laughing.

"Now why'd you think that Mr Graham?"

He said and Will froze. He hadn't paid attention to the belt Budge had been wearing. Such a rookie mistake! Such a fucking obvious mistake! When the first agent walked in through the door Will tried to scream but the shot rang out louder than his voice could be. Will flung to grab the tray when Budge brought the butt of his gun down on Will. The last thing he saw before he lost consciousness was Budge stepping over him, another gun drawn at the agents standing by the door.

The first thing Will felt was the soreness in his body. He groaned as a vicious throb at the back of his head jolted him awake and he opened his eyes to the taste of coppery metal in his mouth. The shock of it made him lurch up to his side and he vomited. As he stopped heaving he took note of his surrounding and found the agents slumped over at the door. He didn't see

Budge nor did he hear anything. He must have lost consciousness for only a few minutes because the blood around him was still warm so he must have just convulsed soon after Budge knocked him off. He got to his feet seeing unanswered calls from Jack. The agents must have informed him before they walked inside. But thinking about Jack wasn't his main concern. Budge hadn't wanted to kill him that much was sure. At least for the time being. He was going to act out now, accelerating what he had planned on doing. Will gritted his teeth through the pain and clenched his fists. Budge was going to go to Hannibal. To either recruit him as his audience or-

Will walked out the store and limped to the agent's car parked on the side. He drove as fast as he could all the while his mind folding in on itself. He thought back to the time when he had stepped into the field and was greeted by the sight of Boyle hoisted on the stag antlers. Such a blatant disregard and disdain for the life that had once flown through her being a stark contrast to the inordinate affection and care the Minnesota Shrike had shown to his girls. He thought back to the time when during one of the rarer times when Jack had actually demanded Will to stay away from the particular case: about a killer murdering people and covering them with wax before dumping them into a river that they had found the perpetrator, inside an old observatory amongst dozens of his victims creating an eye that seemed to have glimpsed into the beyond. And he thought of the recent kill that fitted so neatly into the Ripper's profile the one that had a note of acknowledgement, but to a seemingly clueless subject.

As he pulled in to the driveway Will realised that he never felt calmer. He rang Jack, told him that Hannibal was in danger and to come immediately to his office then left the phone inside the car. The door was left ajar and Will could hear a loud crash from far right, near the ladder to Hannibal's attic of books. He cautiously moved forward. Near Hannibal's work table a body lay prone to the floor. Will didn't go to check if he was alive because his head was turned entirely the wrong way. He could hear faint conversation and laboured breathing. Will grabbed the dark and heavy statue of a stag from where it was perched and proceeded to where he could hear the commotion. He arrived to see Hannibal being thrown across the room with Budge looking no better, bleeding profusely from his side and temple, one of his wrist twisted horribly. He was advancing towards Hannibal who was a second too late to get up and Budge kicked him down viciously. Hannibal grunted but moved quickly, snaking his legs round the other man's and bringing him down with him.

Will watched keenly wondering if he should intervene. He watched as Budge shook Hannibal off and elbowed him on the face with a loud crack. Budge tried to get away but Hannibal gripped the back of his knee and wrenched, Budge falling face first to the ground once again. Hannibal pulled him up and wrapped his hands around Budge's neck getting him in a chokehold.

It was then that Hannibal's eyes snapped up towards Will. His face was bloodied, his hair dishevelled. His eyes had a dark look within them that suddenly lost its sharpness, though the calm tempest still raged. Hannibal's eyes spoke where his lips had not. Will felt the bond surge. He could feel what Hannibal was feeling. Pride, rage, bloodlust, a hint of arousal like a slowly cooking smoke. But overwhelming all these emotions was a tidal wave of relief that soothed Will's own nerves. Will walked steadily, his eyes never leaving Hannibal's. In the expanse that stretched between them so many things fluttered and dance. So many

possibilities, so many choices. Each having their own worlds revolving to its distinct harmony. Here and now was perhaps the truest Will had ever seen Hannibal be, unfettered by the necessity to perform and unbound by the barrage of secrets he had cultivated. Hannibal looked the most human to him now, on his knees and trying to kill another man as Will stood before him. Was it a offering that Hannibal intended? Did he wait for Will's retribution? Because from the way he looked up at Will all supplicant and patient, and vicious and untamed… he knew that Will knew. He was positively giddy. Will didn't even have to listen to the bond thrum happily. He knew. He knew because he was finally beginning to understand the enigma in front of him. His devotion was pointed end, a thing made of smoke and blood. To have Hannibal's devotion and to carry it was an exercise in self-flagellation. An exquisite pain that promised to bring deliverance from sinful ecstasy and instead whispered of a divine titillation. The rush of being forgiven. Of being punished. Did Hannibal want Will's punishment?

All Will could do faced with such disconcerting questions was to raise the statue high above his head and bring it down against Budge's head with a wet thwack. Blood spurted in an arc across Hannibal's face and chest as he let the man fall. Will brought the statue down again, and again, and again. And again. When the deed was done, he let the statue fall down near Budge. Hannibal had stood up by the time Will was done with him. His vison was spotted. He took off his glasses and looked at them bemused. He pocketed the glasses and turned to face Hannibal. There was an odd expression on his face. The bond was sealed tight on his end. Will straightened. He waited for Hannibal.

"You are alright Will?"

Will remained still. He was aware of how harshly his heart was thudding against his chest. There was a pulse throbbing inside his head. He felt calm, despite all of it.

"Budge had implied that you were grievously hurt when you went to question him. I feared for the worst. I couldn't feel you."

The last phrase was said in a quieter voice. It almost sounded accusing. But Hannibal's face held an odd vulnerability that caught Will off guard.

"I was knocked unconscious. And then I- my constitution manifested. I'm… I'm glad to see you're alright." Those words were wrung out of Will with a painful wrench. His heart ached. His mind fought hard to maintain the frail control he had over his side of the bond to blur it in a haze just enough that still buzzed, noticeable to Hannibal but not seen. Hannibal knew it. He chose not to comment and Will was grateful for that. All of his energy was pouring into maintaining the veil over his bond and when he had made sure that Hannibal was safe, that he was alive and well Will's body shut down.

Hannibal caught him before he could collapse. He cradled Will's head in the crook of his neck and chest and held him there, tightly. Hannibal had come so close to losing Will today. The idea rattled him. Made something dark and twisted inside of him to snarl and snap at the person responsible. If it wasn't for Budge's own grand delusion and arrogance, Will would be lost to Hannibal. Though he knew Will could hold his own, he was still unprepared. Urging Matthew Brown down a path was only meant to be a test one which Will had passed with flying colours. But he never wanted Budge to get anywhere close to his Will. Hannibal

refused to entertain any possibility where Will didn't survive. Where he was not with him, bringing home fishes he had hunted and snarking at Hannibal while Winston was draped across his laps. Will's eyes were never meant to lose its life, not by anyone's hand. If it ever came down to it, Hannibal would take those gems and devour them whole before they faded, because they carried Will's very soul. He place a kiss gently on Will's forehead and laid him down at a distance from Budge.

Jack would be here any minute now and he had some work to do.

Hannibal took the statue and cleaned it meticulously with a handkerchief that he took out from his pocket. And then he grabbed the place where Will had held it and brought it down on Budge with controlled aggression. After he was done he checked up on Will again, tracing his eyes. After a few seconds he heard the sirens blaring and rush of footfalls. Hannibal sat cradling Will in his hands looking suitably traumatised. Jack couldn't believe that he was seeing Will unconscious again, bloodied and hurt, in the span of a week. Tobias Budge was dead on the ground and Doctor Lecter looked harried. Jack didn't think he was going to hear the last of it from the Board. There was no way they were allowing Will to come anywhere near any case after this.

Will was carried off into the ambulance and Doctor Lecter insisted he would accompany him. They advised Will should stay at the hospital overnight but Will refused. They hadn't got the chance to speak with one another. After the police left with Will's statements they were cleared to go home. Hannibal had caught Will looking at his mark for minutes on a stretch but didn't comment on it. They returned home and Hannibal waited for Will to say something. There was a disturbance in the bond between them. It felt unsettled.

"I know."

Hannibal didn't stop as he poured coffee for the both of them. Will was standing near the dining table just a few feet away from him behind the counter. He sipped on the warm bitter liquid and watched Will who was standing there in a shirt too large for his waning figure, his eyes haunted but resolved. He looked like those soldiers in old photographs that were taken in between war, distinctly uncomfortable and awkward in those moments of peace.

"What do you mean Will."

Will's eyes flicked to Hannibal's and held. It wasn't the anguish that shone in those eyes that troubled Hannibal when he spoke but the sudden unshakable and impenetrable wall that blockaded Will's end of the bond.

"You're the Chesapeake Ripper."

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!
We're here, at the end of this part of Hanni and Will's story. When I first began writing this, I was really unsure of how this work would fair here. I was and still am an avid reader of Hannigram here and just wanted to share my own love for these character and the show with the community. I never expected the love and kind words you guys had given this story, and for that I'll forever be grateful ❤
The next chapter is going to be a sort of epilogue/prologue of the next instalment in this shrot series that's going to be the last one. I have plans for that one and I guess it's going to be relatively less chaptered than this one.
I really really love you guys and just want to say how awesome you've been, even though I've completely written the line of the song that this story's title is taken from wrong.🤣
I hope you like this end, if not love it. This needed to happen. The path to forgiveness is a hard one. Please share your thoughts or scream at me in the comments. I'd love to cry with you. Happy reading ❤❤❤🌟🌟🌟🌟

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The timeline matches Jack! And Lecter fits every category! He also knew the latest Ripper victim Jack. There are eyewitness accounts who saw them together multiple times at the opera! And isn’t it just a bit too convenient that the moment Lecter travels to America the slew of murders stopped in Florence?”

Jack couldn’t be having a worst day. First the news with Bella. And now this. And to top it all was the reports he needed to make about Budge. Beverly was a good one. He trusted her instincts. But he wasn’t sure what to do with this information.

“Katz. This is conjecture, or even circumstantial at best. We can’t go around accusing everyone who might fit the profile of being the Ripper.”

“I am not accusing *everyone* Jack. I know it’s Lecter! The last murder was too personal. Even Will had said that. And that matches up perfectly with how he began to reciprocate Will's feelings. All I’m asking you is to let me question him Jack. Look at the other connection I’ve shown you! Lecter was on emergency duty the night one other of Ripper's victim, Jeremy Olstead showed up who came in for a broken femur! This can be a lead and I want to see this through.”

Beverly looked at him unyieldingly. That name wasn't the first time he had heard of. It tickled something inside Jack having to hear that name being brought up once again in relation to the Ripper. The thought of Lass still left a bad taste in his mouth. The Ripper had toyed with him, dangling the hope of Lass being alive through those elusive untraceable phone calls. He still remembered the look of disgust her uncle had when he told him they hadn't found her. Jack bore the responsibility of losing Lass singlehandedly. She was excited to share something important with him but he had pushed her aside, more concerned with tagging the next victim of the Ripper. Beverly reminded him of her, and he didn't want to shoulder another responsibility.

"Just one interview Katz. And you're not going to treat the good doctor as a suspect. Just follow through this lead and see what he has to tell you. And come straight to me. Do you understand?"

A look of relief passed over her face. She nodded eagerly. "Won't disappoint you, sir."

Jack sighed heavily. He could never sit comfortably being the recipient of such earnest regard. "Katz, why are you suddenly pursuing this line of thinking? Have you talked about this with Graham?"

"No. He doesn't know anything. And by the way he speaks about Lecter I hardly think he suspects anything. I just… have this hunch Jack. I've gotta follow it through."

"Fine. Just don't overdo it okay. I don't want to have to reprimand you lest Doctor Lecter sues us for harassment."

"Wouldn't dream of it, sir."

"Good. Now out of my office."

****

It was a sunny morning.

Abigail didn't have school that day and her and few of her friends had some plans for the evening that she was looking forward to.

She had chosen to dye her hair black, it suited her well enough. The scarf was drawn in a loose circle around her slender neck artfully hiding the scar underneath. She honestly didn't know what she was doing. Her aunt didn't know about this little date and she as sure as hell wasn't going to tell Hannibal about it. Even though the older man was sweet and kind to her, she could see through the web of subtle manipulations he weaved, earning her trust and keeping that trust by encouraging her reliance on him for everything. She knew what he was. At least she had an idea. She had recognised his voice the moment he had walked into the hospital room with the slightly shorter and distinctly shaggier man beside him, with big sad eyes and an awkward smile. Abigail had wanted nothing to do with him, them really, but the moment the younger man who had introduced himself as Will Graham winced at her curt response and blithe accusation something clinched inside of her. After all it was because of him that she was alive. If he hadn't distracted and tackled her father in time, then she

wouldn't be able to pursue the life she had always wanted for herself. And him being so closed to the shrink she was made to see as well as the head investigator worked in her favour. And Will wasn't all too bad of a guy. Reticent, grumpy and stilted of course but he had a dry sense of humour that charmed her. And he could understand her. She never once felt like an ugly lying bitch when she was with him. His trust was so easily given, so whole in its sincerity that Abigail found herself wanting to be the kind of person Will believed her to be. Not the girl who was willing to do anything to survive, anything to get out and away and thrive.

Of course she was put into that kind of situation because of Hannibal. How he had known about her father and what he had said to him, Abigail tried to think less about. Let the sleeping dogs sleep and all that. But when Freddie managed to get through to her the second time after Hannibal and Will had stopped her from getting that interview, Abigail wanted to see it for herself. If Freddie was willing to come all this way for her in the hope that she might agree, she had no objection. And if… if that book could actually give her a chance to tell her story she might be able to overcome that pesky nagging voice inside her head that wouldn't stop blaming her for everything her father did.

'Your father's action might be abhorrent Abigail, but they were never unloving. Your father loved you very deeply. Enough that he couldn't stand the thought of hurting you.'

Abigail pulled the jacket around her tighter. Sure, but she didn't want the guilt that came with being loved by a monster like that.

Stepping inside the diner Freddie's shock of curly red hair was easy enough to spot.

She waved at her when she saw Abigail, a wide grin across her face.

"I almost wondered if you were going to show up." Freddie said as way of introduction. Abigail took her seat across Freddie.

"'Almost'?" She echoed.

"Yes. But I know you're a woman of your word. And furthermore what you had to go through and then being treated as a suspect when they should be listening to what you have to say… all of it requires such tremendous strength of character and courage. I'm glad you agreed to meet me Abigail."

Oh. Abigail hadn't known that they were possibly investigating her for the murders. She fought to school her expression into one that was more relaxed. She accepted Freddie's kind words and nodded.

"It wasn't easy, but I… I can't continue living in the shadows of my past. I-I loved my dad. But he wasn't the man I knew he was and it's not my fault that he killed all those girls. I wish he hadn't. Every day I pray for this to turn out to be a nightmare and nothing more, for those families to still have their daughters with them, that I wasn't so rudely orphaned. But… but this is what it is. I can either move on and try to live or just fade away and be stuck in the sins of my father."

Freddie's eyes glinted with something undecipherable. She leaned in, too close for Abigail's comfort and she felt herself flush. But Freddie only smiled brightly looking a lot more genuine than the grin she had flashed at her earlier.

"You have a way with your words Abigail. That's good. I can help you make your voice be heard, your words seen and understood. It is after all your life and your tragedy. No one should make the decision of you being heard other than yourself. And you deserve to be seen, love. So, would you like to hear a proposal for a book deal? You'll find that I have plenty of sources in many departments."

Abigail hesitated for a moment. "Would I have complete autonomy to recount what happened?"

Freddie laughed kindly. "Of course! It's *your* story after all Abigail."

Abigail flushed once more under that focused gaze. She had sometimes caught Hannibal looking at Will like that. But she didn't want to jump to conclusions. All she wanted was to tell her side of the story.

"Okay. Let's hear it."

****

Knowing that your soulmate existed, that they were a person with their own trajectory of life separate from your own was a knowledge that Hannibal had always found a little uncomfortable. His entire life he had heard his supposed other-half ask for benediction from his soulmate in the hopes that he'd no longer feel the loneliness gnaw on his bones. Hannibal was curious sometimes and allow short bursts of emotion that his soulmate was always broadcasting at him to filter through. The young boy was almost always alone and sad, and when he wasn't he was afraid. Fear was a rancid flavour that seemed to be stuck on the boy's signature all the time. Happiness wasn't something his soulmate felt often though he could mimic the motions smoothly enough for his father. Hannibal could feel the need to keep his father from worrying too much about him through the bond like an unending prayer. The ferocity with which the boy wanted his father to be happy was strong enough to give Hannibal a headache. His soulmate felt everything so acutely, and tried so hard not to be overwhelmed by those emotions. Sometimes he'd feel a particular brand of anguish that wasn't a stranger to him. He had felt that way for the longest time towards his impeccable, beautiful and serene Lady Murasaki. That feeling of wanting something with so much intent that it burnt through your entire being, that you felt dizzy with its strength, hopeless in front of its magnitude. She was always pristine, in her words and mannerism. Open but never revealing. Her shadowy smiles were what Hannibal had held on to, to battle with his nightmares. The touch of her warm fingers across his temple at nights when he'd found himself short of breathing brought tranquillity that no amount of fervent prayers from his soulmate could ever bring him.

Yes, he knew that feeling well. But it wasn't his soulmate's. He was far more innocent, far more willing to let go and look away than grabbing and holding on. But Hannibal never cared

for those moments. He wanted to keep the bond closed at all times if it was possible. He had spent nights and days wishing for the damned thing to shrivel up and die. He didn't want to be beholden to somebody he never had the intention of ever knowing. It was only his iron-hard restraint that stopped Hannibal from ever stooping as low as to scratch at his mark, to see it gone. She knew of his ire, of course. She was observant like that. Nothing of Hannibal ever escaped her notice. And that was something Hannibal *loved*. He wanted Lady Murasaki to only watch him. To only wait for him. To only yearn for *him*. To only wish that he was her soulmate just as he wished to the stars above. There was no one who could be as perfect as she was. She was everything Hannibal deserved.

And yet.

There was always something at the end. Hannibal found himself looking after an adolescent unwittingly. He was so very curious about Will, about how his mind worked. He was a tantalising mixture of nerves and bitterness. His empathy was a double-edged sword and Hannibal found himself being flayed by those smart blue eyes that peered through the lashes, never meeting his own gaze and always straying just a bit from the mark. Using the Lullaby on Will was almost an impulsive action. He had simply wanted to see if it could do what Murasaki told him. His uncle had tried and failed. But Hannibal wasn't a simpleton like his beloved uncle had been.

And how *sweetly* Will responded! In those moments between wakefulness and sleep Will was the most honest with him.

"I am scared that you will find me lacking. That you'll see how *broken* I am and you will throw me away. No. That you will simply not bother." Will had said quietly during one of their sessions, pleasantly drowsy and lax under the haze of the Lullaby.

"Why do you think my acknowledgement of you is so important Will?"

An uncoordinated smile broke out on his face. His eyes were sorrowful when they met Hannibal's, unfocused.

"*I think* you know that already *Doctor*. You want me to suffer. The gods that you speak of had *dared* to take the choice from you. So you want to spite them. You want them to see how many fucks you give about them deciding a soulmate for you. You hate me Doctor Lecter. And you want to see that hate reflected in me."

"How uncouth Will. You are putting your words into my mouth."

"You don't let me put anything else, Doctor."

And Hannibal perhaps found the inebriated version of Will more fun only because he was willing to cross the boundaries that Will in his conscious state would hardly ever cross.

But those words spoken so blithely years ago floated into his ears now as he watched Will staring at him. Right at him. And brazenly crossing so many unspoken boundaries with such little regard to his own wellbeing Hannibal worried if he hadn't lapsed back into a daze. But Hannibal's interests were piqued. Surely he had known that Will would find out he had been using a rather unconventional method to let him overcome all his inhibitions but he didn't quite prepare for the chance that Will might see through the ruse so easily. He was only beginning the unravelling of Will Graham. His plans needed a slight rearrangement.

In front of Will, he let out a surprised chuckle. Shaking his head at the supposed absurdity of Will's claim he attempted to step closer to him but stopped when Will sent a withering look at him.

"Will," he began. "I don't understand what you're saying. Why would you think I'm the Ripper?"

Will clenched his fists beside him. "You may have to pretend Hannibal but I don't." Will paused for a moment and then laughed. "Oh god! That first time when I met you. On the side of the road. You were just finishing with your kill weren't you? That's why I was triggered. You- *I saw you didn't I*? I saw you kill someone." Will accused his voice trembling with rage and betrayal. But the bond remained stubbornly quiet. Hannibal found that deeply transgressing.

"Will. I don't know why you're thinking like this but you should sit down and let me help you."

"Just like you've been helping me all these years Doctor? Fucking with my brain. Winding me up and letting me drive myself crazy. Why did you do this? Why did you do any of this?!"

"You are accusing me of things I haven't done Will. Are you sure you were feeling alright when you left the hospital?"

"… there's gotta be some reason. Why would you spend so much of your time and resources on me? Why would you enable me to get to a place where you know you are putting yourself at risk of getting caught if you didn't have something to gain. Why did you do this? This is the only thing I've been asking to myself. Why would you do this? Making me believe in you, making me rely on you, making me l-" Will choked, his frame shaking.

"Will, my love, if you would just-"

Will snarled then, "You just *spew* and *spew* your *sickening lies* and *half truths* feeding me assurances and platitudes like I'm a *fucking* child while you tear open my brain and swirl everything inside just to see me tick! Lies upon lies you told me and like a *fool* I believed you! When you said you would not let the nightmares trap me inside my head I believed you!

When you said I had nothing to be scared of when I let myself feel I believed you! When you said you loved me *I fucking believed you*! I went on flaying myself open, revealing every secret, every thought that I ever had, every moment of insecurity and fear I took it all and I went to you knowing that you would see it but not demand them for yourself, knowing that you will hear me." Will broke down, tears falling angrily to the floor as he his hands flew trying to purge these words, these emotions out of his body like they were suffocating him. "***I trusted you!*** You were my first friend. My only friend. I kept fooling myself while you just stood there laughing."

"I am your friend Will. All I have ever wanted was for you to become less afraid. More confident in the being that you are."

"***No, no***. The being that **you** want me to be. You've never wanted me Hannibal. You were always after my ***mind***." He spat the last word like it was poison.

"The funniest part in all of this fuckery is that I am not even upset that you are a fucking serial killer Hannibal. I'm upset because you broke my heart." Will said. "You said you wouldn't and you still fucking did."

In a flash Will grabbed a knife from the counter and held it to his throat when Hannibal moved to stop him.

The cup Hannibal had been holding shattered into splinters on the floor.

"Will. We can talk about this calmly. Please put the knife down." Something painful twisted inside Hannibal. Seeing Will so terribly shaken was off-putting to him. His end of the bond flared annoyingly yearning to be reassured that everything was fine, that its other half was fine despite of it not being able to actually feel the distress that Will gave off.

"You will not take a single step towards me Hannibal. If you open your mouth the blade cuts through the skin. If you move, the blade cuts through the skin. If you try *anything*, the blade cuts through the skin. It was your endgame. Seeing me drive myself mad and kill for you. Or wait until I figured out your puzzle and then make me a part of your legacy. You want to possess me. Pry me open. I'm just an *idea* to you. Oh I can finally see you Doctor Lecter, *and* ***what an ugly picture you paint***."

Hannibal complied with all his demands but he knew that it wasn't going to last long. Will had to act fast.

He turned the blade towards his arm and forced it through skin and muscles. Hannibal moved the second the knife inched away from his throat. He shot across the counter in order to disarm him and subdue him but Will was faster. He wrenched the blade through and across his mark, the pain of flesh and blood only an afterthought in the wake of the soul-searing ache that overcame both Will and Hannibal. Will collapsed to the ground, still trying to destroy the tether that threatened to take him. He wasn't going to be a slave to his emotions any longer.

Hannibal was groaning clutching his head. He still tried to crawl towards Will. His entire body felt like it was on fire. He was being incinerated. The bond shrieked in agony inside his

head but Will snarled back. He was going to get rid off it even if it killed him. The bond thrashed inside his mind just as Will threw his legs and hands trying to dislodge Hannibal who was trying to get him away from the blade. The screams of the bond dying overwhelmed him to such an extent that he could barely hear Hannibal rasping desperately over and over again for Will to fall asleep, to calm down, to listen, to just wait. Hannibal hadn't been afraid like this for a long time. His hands trembled as he was finally successful getting the knife away from Will, bloodied and accusing. Will's left arm was a mess. He was rapidly losing blood. Hannibal spoke whatever that came to his mind. He needed to make this thing work. He wasn't going to lose Will. Not like this.

But Will was adamant to spite Hannibal even when he was so close to passing out. He was blabbering with the last of his breaths but those words were arrows that found its mark and held. Hannibal was helpless again time stop this. How did it come to this? He couldn't understand. It was not supposed to go this way.

"... – *ster*. You were the monster all along. You… you disgust me. I don't- I don't want to know. I don't want to know where you are or what you do. I don't- I don't want to know you anymore. ***I don't want to think about you anymore***."

Each word hurt more than what Hannibal had anticipated. It was strange how Will's last words were deliberately used to hurt Hannibal in a way not even he knew could be done. Hannibal thought himself impervious to such fleeting emotions. Sure he had seen something rare, something intriguing in Will and how his mind worked. And between taking care of him and watching him grow up first almost like a sibling and then as a friend and finally as a lover, Hannibal had become attached to him. His affection for Will Graham had sprouted wings and a heart on their own and didn't even bother to tell Hannibal. Every time he had said that loved Will, he truly did care for him. Never above himself, never at a risk to his own freedom. But now as Will Graham was so close to death having torn of their bond like that had meant nothing to him, Hannibal experienced the kind of emptiness that made him think of wet snow and cracked bowls. A chasm had opened inside of him. The twisting ache of the severed bond was a distant cry in the vast void of simply isolation that Will's absence had left.

With his fading breaths Will left a curse on Hannibal.

Hannibal grovelled. His temple touched the cold floor splattered with blood. His form heaved. Will was limp in his arms. The bond eerily silent.

Hannibal cried and his heart broke.

****

.

..

....

.....

Fishing was a lot different than hunting. One you lured, the other you chased.

Will was not good at either. His trigger would manifest in small magnitude when he went to fish. Perhaps the lesser the consciousness the less effect it would have on Will. But he still felt the moment their hearts seized. It left a faint whisper on his own, like a murmur of a wind here and gone. His dad had been reluctant at first, not wanting to cause him any pain.

But Will was stubborn. He could handle it and besides, killing fish was better than what he would sometimes feel his soulmate to do to others. It was only ever in strokes of violent vibrant colours. The only times he'd see his soulmate feeling in colours. That was a secret he hadn't even told his father. His dad worried about him anyways, no need to add on to it.

His dad smiled at him proudly when he managed to catch one and reeled it in. It wasn't as big as his dad had caught but the warm glow he felt from him was good enough for Will.

"You were always going to be a better man than I could ever be Willy."

His dad had stopped calling him that ever since they had met his soulmate in that far off motel.

"I knew I shouldn't have given it so much thought. Knew that it wasn't right. But I- I just wanted to know why. Why would god do that to me? I had loved your mama Willy. She was the best thing that had ever happened to me. So why…" His dad trailed off looking so unbearably sad. Will couldn't help himself. He went over to where his dad was sitting, his fishing rod forgotten and sinking inside the stream. He grasped his larger hands into his own, oddly bigger than he remembered. When he spoke his voice sounded strange, deeper and gravely.

"Don't be so sad. It's alright, dad. We're okay."

His dad cradled his face so lovingly. His dark eyes were blinking through the tears that just wouldn't stop. Why was he always so sad? Why did his mama leave him alone and sad?

His father shook his head unhappily.

"You're becoming me Willy. Soon you'll grow to hate that name scribbled inside your wrist with every cell of your being. Soon you'll become just an old husk. Living only to hate. Hating only to forget. It's a cursed existence, buddy. It's better you don't go back at all."

Will didn't understand. "Go where dad?"

"Stay here, won't you Willy? Here with me." His dad leaned in, Will could feel his breaths over his lips. Why-

"Don't go. Don't leave me alone Willy. Stay with me. Stay with me."

His dad's voice morphed into something. Something else.

His lips were claimed by a pair of cold ones. Soon he was submerged in an inky cloud that let him float endlessly.

Just as abruptly, his eyes shot open. He tried to speak but didn't have the energy to move a single muscle. The steady beeping of a heart monitor told him he was indeed alive. And possibly inside a hospital. Will pointedly ignored his hand and instead turned his head to the right with much effort.

His eyes widened to see Abigail slumped over in a chair. The beeping of the monitor sped up and that alerted her awake. She groggily looked over at Will in alarm but smiled when she saw he was okay. And then her face broke out into tears as she grabbed Will's other hand carefully.

"Will, oh my god! You're-you. They didn't know if you'd wake up. You had no next of kin and Alana called me to tell what happened. They don't know what happened but I got here as fast as I could. I was so afraid Will. You were not responding. You were-" she tried to say around heaving breaths. "You were *dead for one and a half minutes* Will. We almost lost you!"

Will couldn't focus on the words. He still felt oddly detached from everything. As if he wasn't fully inside his own body. But he tried to say Abigail's name and huffed in frustration when he couldn't. Abigail soothed him, assuring him that he didn't need to speak just yet and that she was leaving to call the doctor and tell them that he'd woken up.

Abigail hadn't mentioned him. And he wasn't inside the room. He couldn't hear him. Or feel him. But why wasn't Bev here? Hadn't Abigail mentioned that Alana had called Abigail to come…

Will didn't fight when darkness came to claim him again. He'd much rather never wake up. But the fates had never liked him much.

****

As the ambulance pulled away from the driveway Beverly stood there shocked but not surprised. Jack was speaking with Lecter. The man was covered in blood, in Will's blood, and didn't look a bit unfazed. If it wasn't inappropriate she'd love to acquaint her right hook with Lecter's high cheekbones. However in the ongoing chaos an idea creeped into her mind. She took note of her surroundings. Seeing Lecter arguing with Jack and the first responders already clearing the premise, Beverly took her chance and sneaked through the awning drawing room and past the kitchen and dining area further into the house. She looked behind her back to see if anyone had noticed her but so far so good.

She quietly looked around the place until she came across a small cupboard that was more like a long narrow room. She turned the knob and it opened to reveal a few boxes and a relatively new collar and pet supplies stocked up into a corner. She had forgotten about Winston. She hadn't seen the old but sweet dog anywhere. She closed the door and glanced around until she found the study room. But unfortunately it was locked and she didn't think she had the kind of time to pick it open and snoop around. So she made her way back into the kitchen and was momentarily taken aback by the amount of blood that had stained the rich carpet, spilling over onto the polished floor.

Her heart seized at the thought of her best friend so badly hurt by the person who was supposed to take care of him. She fought the angry tears. It was no use to become overwrought with emotions. They'd be handled later. She looked up to see if there was anyone near the vicinity and making sure she was well and truly alone she looked around the kitchen in hopes of finding what she didn't quite know. If Lecter was the Ripper, he'd need some sort of place to carry out those ridiculously high stunts with the bodies. Or even killing them. Beverly didn't think Hannibal would actually be so amateurish as to do it in a well-known place but something caught her eye.

Will's blood had an incline, it's trail sloping downwards and disappearing into an innocuous edge of the carpet. Beverly watched out for Lecter but she could still hear him conversing with Jack. It was going to be a quick peek anyways. She pulled away the carpet and saw a door without any locks. *That arrogant, pompous dick*. She pried the door open not making any sound whatsoever. There was a relatively small flight of staircase that opened up into a narrow sleek corridor. She turned on the flashlight on her phone and shut the door behind her. Making the least amount of noise as possible she descended down the steps, a heavy feeling in her gut. The scent of chemicals and bleach was strong here, something medical and clinical, almost reminded her of hospital corridors. The walls were dark and metallic, heavily padded and ventilated. There was a workshop of a kind in front of her where the corridor ended covered with plastic sheets. The area was even more padded, no sound would escape from here. She quickly turned back to see if anyone was there and opened her camera and began to take pictures.

The sinking feeling doubled when she stopped by a long metal table, iron chains fixed to the ceiling and an array of sophisticated and surgical tools neatly arranged in rows upon rows of shelves. She walked closer to the table, trying to see if she could find any evidence. She

crouched low revealing a looming silent figure obscured by the dark behind her. She took out her nail filer and scraped along the ridges of the table. She took out a plastic bag that she carried in her wallet, just in case. She put a small piece of what could be dried blood and a piece of hair inside the bag and held it close to the flashlight.

She smiled, “Gotch’a.” she murmured. The figure behind her stepped even closer.

The light however casted shadows of the plastic on a reflective surface and Beverly frowned at the refrigerator that was kept there, silent and almost mocking amidst the various other tools. Beverly’s heart dropped. She took a step forward but then froze, another kind of dread filling her stomach. It was faint, but in the gap between each thud of her heart, she could hear another set of breathing.

She slowly turned coming face to face with Lecter who was standing there with his arms relaxed by his side, his legs shoulder length apart. Every single cell in Beverly screamed at her to ***run run run*** but there was no where to go. She had the tools behind her as the only weapon against Lecter who held himself so unnervingly still, his muscles all coiled – like a beast about to launch at its prey.

“What a *clever* little girl you are. Will's brave knight.”

Beverly took that spilt second to grab the sharp tool and turn off her flashlight. At the last second before the light dimmed, she saw the man moving at an inhuman speed and then everything cut to black.

Chapter End Notes

* eeekkkkk * hugs Beverly tightly. They didn't deserve you!!!!! *sobs *
I am angstyfandomhappyending on tumblr if you peeps would like to scream endlessly into the void about fandoms and random shit.
See you soon guys.
Take care❤❤❤❤❤❤🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Notes

(ꙮдꙮ;) this is it guys! This is the end!!!! I began writing this story more than a year ago and never expected it to be read by so many. Your comments really egged me along and all the kudos, and subscriptions and bookmarks made my heart swell! Thank you for each and everyone who read this story of mine!
Seeing Mads and Hugh together in the recent pictures and Bryan being our saviour in these uncertain times of fandoms losing their shit on tumblr and twitter, I felt like this is the least I could do!
The next instalment will hopefully come very soon, at least I hope before the end of this year but I'm also overcome by Obikin and Loki so we'll see how it goes. But I do plan to get a chunk of the next fic written before I start posting here so it will take time.
I'm angstyfandomhappyending on tumblr so anyone can come and say hi if you like. I can be found drowning in reblogs and all sorts of fandoms.
Happy reading and much love ❤

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a good day.

There were only a couple of pieces he had to repair. A broken antique radio that looked like a 1935 wooden console. The phonograph was a little wonky and the customer wanted it to look presentable, it didn't matter if the thing actually didn't work. But it suited Will just fine. He liked the process of taking care of old and broken things. He also had a motorboat engine that needed a little tweaking and Will was looking forward to that, that old scent of oil and grease lulled him into a trance like state where he felt the most at ease, the routine of doing something so many times that it was ingrained into one's psyche- he found comfort there, something which was becoming a rare occurrence. Will reeled himself back before he could veer any further. No good thing lied beyond those barbed fences in his mind. He'd chide himself for making it so obvious in his head if the sight of those twisted gnarly things when he closed his eyes wasn't the only thing that kept him more or less sane.

A series of quick and excited yappings broke him out of his reverie. He laughed when Buster almost barrelled into the toolbox in his excitement before immediately turning on his heels and sniffing around Will's legs. He kept the brush down on his workbench and instead picked him up for a cuddle. Will snorted when Buster sniffed and licked at the back of his ear huffing loudly. "Yeah, yeah, I get it. It's good to see someone's enjoying their afternoon."

"It's not just him. Betty has made a new friend, Mr Graham."

Akriti brought the remainder of his little pack around the shed, Winston chirping happily at him while Betty gave a quick tail wag and then loped towards the house, the rest following her suit. Will stepped away from his work and graciously took the paper bag that she extended.

She was too sweet for this world. “You really didn’t have to, Aki.”

Akriti snorted and gave him a long look. Will supposed he had been wearing the same patterned shirt for two consecutive Wednesdays and he couldn’t fault her for assuming the worst. Not when it was actually kind of true. He had taken showers in between of course. Just didn’t feel like a change of clothe was necessary.

“Dad wanted you to have it. He told me to tell you that the ship sailed like it was brand new. You know magic Mr Graham. I could’ve sworn that old thing was way past it’s expiration.”

Will shook his head. “It just needed some patience. I’m glad that he is happy. He told me it belonged to his grandfather.”

Akriti hummed decisively. Will could feel the question brewing inside her head and he wanted to change the subject before she could have the chance to ask it.

“So for the next Wednesday I can take them out. You’ve been a godsend and I’ve already wired you the payment-“

“Dad wanted you to come to dinner tonight, Will. I mean- he didn’t tell that to me explicitly because you know how knobheaded he can get – don’t tell him I called him that- but he’d also just kinda stare at the boat longingly and that’s a little off-putting. And like you could come and surprise him. Not that he’d be surprised because he’d see you coming over 'cause he’s always looking at the window when he thinks no one sees him but me and Pichi do but that’s beside the point. You should come tonight.”

Akriti and her father were his neighbours. They were good people, actually kind-hearted and a little clueless about the world at large. Ajit, her father, owned a small diner down the curb and was a delightful person, sunny and personable. He met Akriti when Shea, one of the first strays he had adopted once he settled in this quiet cul de sac near the harbour, had run off in fright and into their yard. The fault was completely Will's own- he had been trying to help her too quickly, he should have seen how scared the poor thing was, trying to pet her so soon was only going to make her more spooked- and he was completely unsure of how he’d approach his neighbour about the loudly whining dog in their yard because it had been months by then that he had to speak to anyone beyond necessity and he had quite frankly forgotten how speech even worked when Akriti had walked out sleepily because of course it was in the middle of the night that he had found Shea and she had helped both him and the dog to calm down.

He honestly didn’t know how she had manager to do that. She was only a child – a teenager really- but she spoke with such calm assurance and a soft command that made it easy for Will to trust her with her dog, and then when she cried out in alarm at the blood drenching the freshly mowed lawn because Will had completely forgotten Shea had bitten his hand in panic, and ushered him inside so her father could wrap it up, to trust her with himself.

Ajit had taken it in stride, the pair of them working and moving comfortably around one another in a deep sense of understanding, something that immediately put Will on edge. Will had observed them enough through the blinds of his window to know that they were as normal as they could get but Will didn't like how calmly Ajit spoke, how he reassured him that he wasn't going to call any rescue shelter on Shea because he could understand that she was scared and meant no harm and that Will could relax and that yes, he did understand Will and no he wasn't going to take Shea away from him.

Everything else after that was a little hazy. Ajit had wrapped him up quite neatly, something that made Will even more suspicious and Akriti had actually managed to get Shea to eat some scraps that they had left.

"I left her in the kitchen with the bowl of food. She's a smart girl. Just a little scared."

Will could barely process those words. Everything had been just so bright and loud around him. And then Ajit had handed him a stone, a faded pink stone that shone slightly under the light of the room and told him he could hold on to that for a moment. Will didn't understand why but the sharp contrast of the cool, rough texture of the stone drew all his hyper aware senses to that stone. He ran his fingers over the stone and felt the world around him come into focus.

"It's my daughter's. They always do the trick!" he had informed him in a mixture of pride and fondness.

Akriti had rolled her eyes. "That's a rose quartz, Dad. You should've grabbed the turquoise. That's the turquoise one on the alter."

"Well- all of them are useful aren't they. And they're all cold and stones, and you always say it's the intention that matters."

"*Daaad*, it's crystals dammit!"

"Yep. Now you owe me a dollar, *betta*."

His nerves had settled more as he listened to them argue casually. They had even offered to make something light for Will to eat but he had already imposed on them too much. He wanted to figure out a way he could take Shea back to his home without her getting scared again when Ajit had stepped up, scratching at his mop of curly dark hair, his beard having stray brushes of white around the chin that gave away his age because his voice had been shockingly young and he had a youthful charm about him that Will would come to begrudgingly notice in their later meetings. But for then, he had offered to keep Shea in their home until she felt more settled to return to Will.

"My daughter has a cat, she's a sweet thing really. Her name's Pichi and she can make friends left and right. You can come over tomorrow in the morning and we can all have breakfast together! I mean- if it's something that you'd like. Really I didn't mean to-"

"You'd let her stay in your home?"

Ajit had blinked several times like he had half expected Will to never speak again after the anxious rambling when they had found him. Will's voice sounded pathetic even to his own ears, frail and cracked. He doubted if he looked like he had his life in control. Will shrunk into himself, the chill of the night registering. He had ran out in only his shorts and shirt. His hand stung sharply reminding him of the bite. He'd had to go to a clinic tomorrow for that.

Seeing Will retreat Ajit had tagged on, “Of course! My husband was a vet and picked up strays wherever they went too so I’m a little knowledgeable about this stuff. And you’re welcome to come tomorrow and join us. Shea will be settled by then hopefully.”

“How’d you know that name?” Will had snapped alarmed.

Ajit was only slightly taken aback by that. His dark eyes were impossibly kind when he spoke, “You called her by that name when she got here.”

Will felt a little stupid, and still all over the place. He nodded. Tried to speak something more but his body was threatening to buckle down under the stress and shock of conversing with people other than those inside his head and he had to get out. He just had to leave.

The next morning he was absolutely mortified and beyond humiliated. He ached to see Shea but didn’t know how on earth he was ever going to actually approach them after everything. He had tried to avoid facing the situation by sneaking away onto the main road by taking a roundabout way and a cab to see the doctor which strained his budget a lot, but when he had come back he had seen a little note outside his door, unassuming and innocent and his heart had leapt into his throat. Of course not. This wasn’t a letter. He had quickly bent down and opened it, his mind wilfully blank until the handwriting brought him crashing to the ground. His hands trembled as he read the note. It was signed from Ajit. They had invited him over to dinner, should he felt up for it.

Will felt like the worst kind of person. That had been the first time after 8 long months that he cooked something. There were barely any thing left good enough to eat in his fridge. So he grabbed the packages of mac 'n' cheese and brought that to the Banjerjees. Ajit had been the one to open the door. He had flushed prettily when he saw Will standing there with food, looking decidedly more put-together than the night before. Will had noticed. Of course, he did. And he knew that he shouldn’t continue this. They were a bunch of good people, the only ones in the community who didn’t look at Will strangely. The familiarity with which they talked to Will, spoke about his dogs and about dishes and spices, and the happy gratitude of parenthood while Akriti scoffed, all of it should have made him irritated, should’ve overwhelmed him and made him storm out of there but it didn’t. Almost greedily he soaked up the easy affection shared between the father and daughter. Their laughs brought whispers of memories fleeting past Will’s heart and hearing about their story of coming to Florida on a whim from India as an escape made him sink deeper in to the cushioned chair, the glass of wine forgotten in his hand. Will didn’t speak much, allowing Ajit to carry the conversations. As he sat there eating a delicious dinner, Will was almost moved to tears with the absent feeling that caught him off guard. He almost felt like a person again. After such a long time. He had almost forgotten- almost lost himself to the grief and anger and pain… so, so much pain. He had hidden it under the ruse of a coughing fit and had excused himself to the bathroom to get himself under control. He was going to be okay, he had decided then. He had

mourned enough. He was only going to mourn that which deserved it from now on. Like Beverly who had been killed and bisected into layers, staged and exhibited : seen and examined, laid bare to witness. A whisper curling into his ear and sneering ‘See? That’s the price of friendship. Doomed to be a pinned statement for the entirety of your life. What a great friend you are Will.’ Beverly who was sweet and kind and fiery and loyal. Beverly who dreamed so much, who was deeply loved by her little sister and brothers, by her other friends and well liked by her peers… Beverly who was now gone and all because Will couldn’t keep it to himself.

For the past five years Will had mourned. It became easier to live with it rather than ignore it. Whiskey helped a lot. And his dogs were a constant source of all the support and love he needed. He had things figured out, if something were to happen to him. Shea and Betty loved their lives here and Akriti loved them even more. Ajit had a soft spot for the spooked spaniel who had found her way to his home on that fateful night and Will had talked things over with people he knew and trusted who could take care of his dogs after he was gone. Winston though, he knew Will too well. Nowadays he couldn’t sit and lounge outside with his glass because Winston was always there sitting in resignation and staring balefully at Will with sad admonition. Sometimes it was hard for him to look at Winston. The memories he’d bring up were altogether unwelcoming. It was of no fault of Winston and Will worked hard to remind himself that every time Winston came close to him. Maybe Winston understood. That’s why he’d rarely jump into his laps like he used to before. Even though he was a big dog, sitting in laps was his favourite thing.

But he had changed. And that was Will's fault too.

Will weakly acquiesced, knowing Aki didn’t buy it but wasn’t going to push it. She waved goodbye at his dogs and walked away, leaving Will to his thoughts. He returned to his work feeling heavier than before. He thought of giving a hug to Winston today after he went home.

His evenings passed like any other. He checked every window and door under the guise of taking a long walk around the house. He cleaned his dogs' beds and rearranged them, prepared their food and heated up some leftovers and then drew a bath. He submerged himself in the hot unscented water until his skin felt like it would fall off his bones and then dragged himself to the room that was apparently his bedroom but he had never slept there for a single day since he moved in. He finally got rid of his shirt and pants and dumped them in the already stuffed wash basket that he never seemed to have the energy to take to the washing machine and donned on the only clean articles of clothe in his closet – a half-sleeved cotton shirt and shorts. He didn’t bother to comb his wet hair, picked up the local newspaper and read through it for a moment before whistling and giving his dogs food in the kitchen area as he nursed a glass of deep amber liquid and watched them eat with gusto. Winston had lost his appetite slightly though he still loved livers and the doctor had assured him that it was common, Winston wasn’t getting any younger but Will didn’t like to think about that so he didn’t instead crouching low and petting his old friend with his eyes heavy. Then he stared at the landline because he had foregone mobiles completely. They got on his nerves too much and when he needed internet or a phone he’d borrow from Ajit. His laptop still sat in a box pushed deep inside his closet, along with other stuff that belonged to somebody else from a

different lifetime. All of Will's eccentricity fit perfectly well with the natural oddity that Florida had already.

Sugarloaf Key was a pretty busy place, what with all the tourists and transients flocking the island. He lived in the Lower Sugarloaf Key that did have a lot of traffic but made it easier for him to blend in with everyone and everything else. His little shop operated on word of mouth well enough for him and his dogs. It wasn't a lot, not by a long shot, but the bareness of it all was comforting, he didn't miss high-end clothes and luxurious foods at all, though having a car would make things easier but it was what it was. He then debated as he always did about going out and stepping into the silvery sand under the light of the moon, just dipping his feet into the cold water of the Atlantic but then never did.

Instead he made himself comfortable on the sofa and fell into an alcoholic stupor, his food long gone cold on the small counter.

The next morning was cloudy and it reflected on his mood. He was done with quite a few orders and was on his way for a short break to his liquor cabinet when he saw the figure standing at the foot of his house.

Will's heart dropped to the ground and he quickly turned around hurrying to get away from this place but of course, of *fuckin*' course he had seen him.

"Will! Hey!"

Will didn't want to stop. He really, really didn't because it had been five years and he didn't want to go back to the past, to that life anymore because he wasn't the same – but he did stop because the last time Will had ever seen Jack was on a hospital bed with several tubes stuck into him and a machine breathing for him as his jugular was almost split open by *Hannibal*.

Will squeezed his eyes, his body rigid. *God!* He didn't want to think about it. About any of it.

"You look like hell, Graham. Are you not eating enough?"

Jack sounded healthy. His voice didn't wheeze, he spoke clearly. Will knew rationally that Jack had time to heal over the several years and he wasn't in the habit of self-mutilation like Will was so of course he was fine. But. Will didn't think he could handle seeing Jack.

The silence was enough of an answer for Jack and he cleared his throat. "Ah. I am sorry. Old habits."

And it would seem even Jack was capable of change.

Will turned around then, dreading the moment when he'd look upon Jack and everything that had gone so pleasantly blurry inside his head would jolt back to life. He had gotten so good at pretending that all those horrible things had happened to a different person that it was physically shocking for Will to look at Jack and be reminded of everything.

Time had been kind on Jack though he looked so weary. His hair gone white around the ages and the stubble on his chin was days old. Jack was still tall and wide, but the perfect effect of looming disapproval that was like a second skin on him seemed to have vanished, only leaving a tired, old man in its wake. Will's eyes inadvertently trailed down towards the discoloured mark at the base of his jugular, covered with white scruffy hair. Jack saw him look at that but he didn't react, used to having people look at it in question. But Will knew how it happened. Who put that there.

"Jack. How did you find me?"

Jack had the decency of looking uncomfortable when he answered, "I had to collect some favours and talk with some people I'd rather not. You disappeared well Will. Not even Alana could tell where you were. And I could understand why. The trials were a circus. You'd be glad to know that Lounds was hit with a lawsuit for slander and libel. Alana took care of that for you." So that was where the money had come from.

Will shook his head ruefully, struggling to keep his shaking to a minimum. "I'm not mad at Lounds for doing what she does best Jack. I'm not mad at anyone, least of all with the world for how they treated me. I didn't need sympathy then, I don't need it now. It's good to see you in good health Jack," Will said sincerely, letting the waspishness disappear from his voice for a moment, "but I don't want you back in my life. Please leave." He finally averted his eyes.

When Jack spoke his voice was resigned. "I know seeing me isn't doing a lot for you Will. And believe me when I say that I'd want nothing more than to leave you with your quiet life here,"

"'*But*'," Will said sardonically. "There's always something Jack. Greater and far more important than the sanity and wellbeing of Will Graham."

Jack didn't react and that was a reaction in itself. Will was so tired suddenly. His fear and anger slowly began to pour out of his body leaving him empty and dry.

"What is it now Jack? I can't do the fun old tricks anymore. My brain is all kinds of messed up from the soul bond I torn up. Rubber stamped and all." Will said without letting the words reach him, on autopilot, the cautious words and apprehension of all the doctors and nurses floating to his mind.

"I am not here to ask you to look Will." Jack said and everything inside Will collapsed. The fences grew higher and higher and higher until they converged in on themselves and Will was cocooned inside. His hands grew cold and he slowly became aware of the ever-present dull throb in his left hand hidden underneath his work gloves and long sleeves. Five years, and it still wasn't long enough. Those memories would just not let him go. Neither then, nor now… it would never let him go.

Will's expression was something terrible because it made Jack hesitate, think again before he spoke because Jack was a smart man, he knew that he had come to ask Will for a sacrifice, knew that he had to get it willingly because that was the price for the man's secrets, information that could prevent another family from dying a horrible death.

“Lecter wants to see you. He’ll only speak with you there, Will. I’m sorry.”

Somewhere distantly Will swore he could hear Beverly laughing- a horrible, cruel laughter.

No escape. None at all.

Chapter End Notes

Betta is a hindi endearment meaning beloved child but this is also used in bengali as well.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!